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Satoshi Wagahara
Illustration ■ Oniku

イラスト ■ 029

和ケ原聡司

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電撃文庫

Hataraku Maou-sama!

Volume 2

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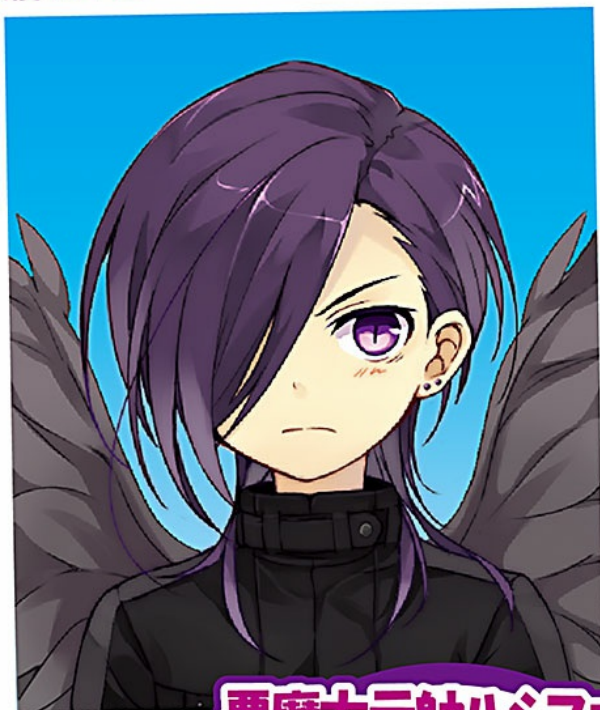
和ヶ原聡司

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はなちゃん魔



履歴書



ふりがな	うるしはら はんぞう
氏 名	うるしはら はんぞう
し 年	な い 月 日 日生 (満 歳) 性
ふりがな	どもい
現 住 所	とうきょうとしぶやく
	ガイア・ローザさきす
	まおうじょう
電 話	050-0000-0000

真奥はそれでも魔王なの？

悪魔大元帥ルシフェル

うるしはら はん ぞう
漆原半蔵

真奥と勇者抹殺のためエンテ・イスラより遣わされた刺客だったが、激闘の末、再び真奥の軍門に下る。毎日ネットばかりしている引き籠もりのニート。



学歴・職歴

です by 芦屋

です。

しはら

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志望動機

本人希望

通勤時間

手伝

みさだお

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遺憾である by

履歴書



恵美殿は、貞夫殿と親密なお付き合いをされているのが。

ふりがな かまづき すずの

氏 名

鎌月 鈴乃

平成×年 10月 1日生(満18歳) 性別 女

ふりがな とうきょうとしぶやくささづか

区笹塚 ×

号室
ない

年

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私立聖ブルーロ

私立聖ブルーロ

私立聖ブルーロ

卒業

入学

資格

特技・趣味

志望動機

本人希望欄

通勤時間

住み込みで

人類皆兄弟

保護者の氏名

かまづき すずの
鎌月鈴乃

魔王城の隣の部屋に引っ越してきた少女。品行方正で礼儀正しい。常に食糧難である魔王城に食事の差し入れをし、千穂(と勇者)を戦慄させる。









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はじめての魔法使い

Satoshi Wagahara
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和ヶ原聡司

2



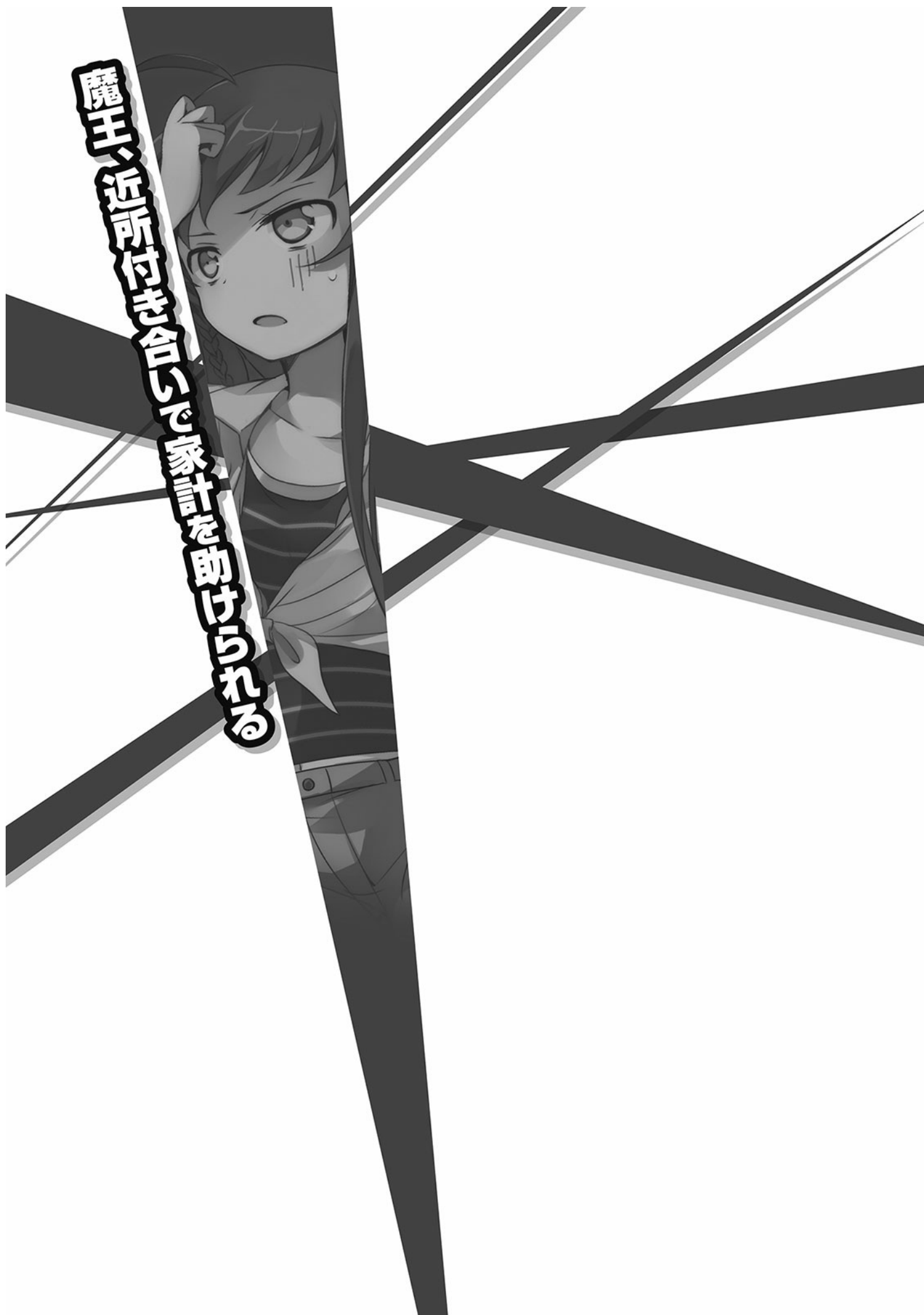
If you have any questions regarding the translations, or if you want to meet people from the HataMaou community, please visit our Discord Server by clicking on the picture above

**Translated by Nigel
Edited by Aardvark and Ice Phantom
EPUB by **sw**hp**

CHAPTER 1

THE DEMON KING'S FINANCES ARE SAVED BY HIS NEIGHBORS

魔王、近所付き合いで家計を助けられる。



The coals blazed up fiercely, roasting the shredded and seared flesh.

The blood and fat flowing from the countless chunks of flesh fuelled the flames further, serving only to heighten their own torment.

The odor of charring meat and bone hung in the surrounding air like a haze of death.

He licked his lips as he beheld this scene, and the smile on his face could only be described as that of a monstrous beast driven by desire.

“Kukuku, how do you like it? How do you like the feeling of the scorching flames of hell while you’re bound hand and foot?”

The voice was sinister and subdued, but it could not conceal the cruel delight its owner felt as he heard the dying cries of the “meat” that burned in the flames.

“I will devour your flesh, your organs and even your bones. They shall be the fuel for my ambition. You may die at ease knowing that, kukuku...”

“Demon King-sama...”

A worried voice came from beside the flames and the smoke, but the speaker was unmoved.

“Well, hang on, don’t worry. I won’t be satisfied until they’ve been thoroughly scorched.”

“No, ah, like I was saying, Demon King-sama...”

“Then, let the feast begin! I shall begin with your innards! How about that, are you afraid now?!”

“...”

“There’s nowhere to run! The first sacrifice I shall accept... is you!”

With a great shout, he nimbly extended the chopsticks in his right

hand.

The tips of those traditional weapons seized the roasted red meat, dipped it into a small dish of hot sauce that was as red as the pools of blood in hell, and then cruelly, mercilessly delivered it to his awaiting maw.

“Kukuku, this is delicious...”

He had a wide and evil grin on his face as he chewed heartily on the meat.

“...Demon King-sama.”

“What is it, Alciel?”

His face immediately reverted to normal, and he looked at the man who had just spoken.

“Please be more quiet when eating. You’re disturbing the surrounding customers.”

The tall man called Ashiya knitted his brows through a gap in the roiling smoke from the opposite side of the table.

“Hm? Ah, yeah, I guess I got excited and ended up raising my voice a little.”

The mundane-looking young man called Demon King looked around.

“Also, please don’t make such a big fuss about roasting a bit of beef. Anyone would think you had never eaten anything good before.”

“I don’t think so. We usually only have plain or junk food, so obviously I’d get worked up over eating something good like this.”

Saying so, the “Demon King” picked up hunks of meat, innards, and vegetables from the grill and transferred them to his plate.

“Still, the guts are delicious, though I said in the past that I didn’t understand those demons who liked eating offal. This sweetbread is

squishy and rich, to say nothing of the crispness of the intestines and the cartilage! Is this beef stomach? It looks weird, but it's tasty!"

"...Wonderful."

Ashiya nodded, a complicated expression on his face, and gave up on trying to rein in the Demon King's emotions.

This was a weekend evening, so about 80% of the tables in this place had smoke curling up from where the customers were roasting meat. Fortunately, nobody seemed disturbed by the Demon King's dramatic display, and Ashiya reflected on why he had compelled the Demon King to eat that plain food in question.

Five minutes away from the Keio Line's Sasazuka Station in Shibuya, Tokyo, there stood a block of wooden apartments called the Villarosa Sasazuka. Room 201 of those apartments was known as the "Demon King's Castle". Ten minutes away from the Demon King's Castle, in the No. 100 Shopping Street, was a very popular beef offal grill house.

To celebrate their 10th anniversary, they were offering a free drink with every pre-dinnertime meal (Fridays and eve of public holidays excluded), and almost every single dish of meat was only 390 yen. Therefore, the Demon King Satan – in other words, Maou Sadao – strongly insisted that they eat out.

Since he had been in high spirits after payday, he phrased it in terms of a "celebration", and even the manager of the Demon King's Castle's finances, the Archdemon Alciel – Ashiya Shirou – was swayed by him.

As he sipped on the free glass of oolong tea, Ashiya brought a colored plate to his hand.

"You can't just eat meat alone. Have some vegetables too. 390 yen is a steal when I think about how much I wanted to eat vegetables at home."

Saying so, he deftly distributed the vegetables to Maou's plate.

“Ah – vegetables are pretty expensive.”

“A single cabbage is already 350 yen. It’s ridiculous.”

“Well, I like meat, so anything will do for vegetables.”

“Your nutrition will suffer. At least roast up a bit of fish. We can’t grill it in the oven of the Demon King’s Castle, mainly because our exhaust fan isn’t strong enough to vent the smell and smoke outside.”

The two archfiends swallowed the sad problems of life with a mouthful of oolong tea.

“Oh yes, we should probably get dinner for Urushihara. Do they have something like a yakiniku box?”

Maou suddenly picked up the menu and pointed to the corner, which listed the prices for take-out yakiniku bento boxes. The pork belly box was only 600 yen; a very reasonable price.

However, Ashiya shook his head, a miserly expression on his face. He picked out the remaining salad and then asked the waiter to take the plates away.

“No need for that. We’ll just get him a pork bowl from Sugino¹ya on the way back.”

“Eh?”

Maou was surprised by the unexpectedly frigid statement. Ashiya continued venting his spleen as he took big mouthfuls of salad.

“That’s because I remember Urushihara’s been doing something called online shopping. He doesn’t work and then goes on to use your credit card to make reckless expenditures. Each individual item isn’t that expensive, but if we give him an inch, he’ll take a mile.”

“Eh? He was doing that?”

“Last month’s credit card statements list a lot of expenses apart from the computer and internet plan that you purchased, Demon

King-sama. If we didn't waste that money, then it must be his doing."

"Ah – a laptop... It's true, he's been whining a lot more about the laptop ever since I first bought it."

Maou had bought the laptop – arguably the most advanced piece of technology in the Demon King's Castle – for Urushihara, in anticipation of how he would use his abilities.

"Well, the stress of not being able to go out might cause him to betray us again, so we should probably forgive him for small things."

"Please do so. Please wield the iron gavel of judgement."

Though Ashiya's face was still sullen, the air between them cleared thanks to Maou's confident words.

"Then, can I indulge myself a little here?"

"Hah?"

Ashiya's doubtful query as he put his chopsticks down interrupted Maou as he was going through the menu.

"Well, I've been holding myself back a little because of Urushihara, so how about another helping of superior pork belly? Superior pork belly!"

The superior pork belly, superior beef stomach, and superior tendon were all 490 yen, even at a discounted price.

Somewhat dejected, Ashiya answered: "...It can't be helped. Just for today. We're done after those."

"Woohoo!"

Maou signalled the waiter as he whooped and asked for the bill after ordering a generous portion of pork belly. Ashiya smiled as he saw the delighted grin on his master's face with every mouthful of pork belly, but he was depressed inside.

He drank from his glass until only the ice cubes were left, as though to drown the meaningless thoughts in his mind.

Ente Isla, the Continent of the Holy Cross, was a land protected by the gods. The Demon King – who had declared that he would conquer the five-fold continent which floated on the Sea of Ignora – currently resided in Sasazuka of Shibuya, Tokyo.

The Demon King Satan. He was the ruler of the Demon World, where the creatures of darkness roamed. He was a being whose very name was a synonym for terror and cruelty.

With his four Archdemons, Satan harried the forces of humanity in Ente Isla, leaving him only one step away from world conquest.

However, there was a Hero who shattered the Demon King's ambitions. This defender of Ente Isla was called Emilia Justina. After losing the final battle to Emilia, the Demon King leapt into a Gate which opened to another world, planning to flee Ente Isla.

He endured the shock of passing through the Gate with his battered and drained body and reached the world on the other side, which was called Earth. It was a bigger, more advanced world than Ente Isla, ruled by humanity.

After drifting to a nation called "Japan" on the world called Earth, Satan and Alciel could not maintain their forms as high-level demons, because this world was lacked the demonic magic, which should have been present in nature.

In order to recover the power to return to Ente Isla, the two Archfiends blended into the nation of Japan, living as humans in a land which did not know the touch of the sacred or the demonic while they looked for a way to restore their demonic magic.

And then, a year passed on earth. During this time, the two archfiends took on the appearance of independent freeters.

Demon King Satan became an A-rank crew member of the fast

food franchise called MgRonald's. He worked at their Hatagaya Station branch as Maou Sadao.

The Archdemon Alciel was the househusband who supported Maou's lifestyle as Ashiya Shirou.

They used Room 201 of the venerable apartment block known as Villarosa Sasazuka (located in the Shibuya district of Tokyo) as an interim Demon King's Castle, living every day with enthusiasm and energy.

Far removed from the objective of world conquest, those days soon became the new routine. Not long after that, a certain rainy day resulted in Maou Sadao handing an umbrella on a whim to a girl taking shelter.

That girl was the Hero Emilia Justina, who had journeyed between worlds to hunt down the Demon King Satan.

Although Maou panicked when he learned that the Hero had showed up, he later learned that Emilia had come to Japan alone, and worked part-time as Yusa Emi to survive.

Though she had found her nemesis, she could not freely use her powers, and she had no choice but to work a normal life as an employee in a Japanese company, while the standoff continued.

During this time, the two of them were attacked by an enemy calling themselves "an assassin from Ente Isla", whose aim was "to kill the Demon King and the Hero".

One of them was Lucifer, a fallen angel that had once served the Demon King as an underling, who should have been defeated by Emilia the Hero. The other was Olba Meyer, once a member of Emilia's group, an Archbishop of the Holy Church who wielded tremendous authority in Ente Isla.

Lucifer and Olba's methods were cruel and inhumane, and they harried Maou and Emi into several one-sided conflicts.

However, Maou awakened as the Demon King Satan at the critical

moment, and the Hero unleashed the holy magic she had been saving up to go back. The situation changed, and they successfully beat back the two assassins.

The Demon King was reborn, and the Hero's friends from Ente Isla had showed up to support her. It looked as though the final battle between good and evil would take place.

However, Satan used the demonic magic he had recovered to restore the town which had been damaged in the fighting and to wipe the memories of the people on the scene. Thus, his strength faded, and he returned to the shape of Maou Sadao.

Emilia decided to stay in Japan, under the excuse of keeping an eye of the Demon King, who had wasted his chance to go back. And so the deadlock of good and evil continued in Sasazuka of Shibuya, Japan.

After stepping out of the grill house, their lungs were instantly filled with hot and humid air. There was no fog, but instead a choking sensation which felt like water was entering their lungs.

As early summer became true summer, the days grew longer and the temperatures grew higher. Then there was what were known as April showers, which led to full unhappiness meters every day.

“What the hell, it was actually cooler in there with the coal fire!”

“Air conditioning is just the best.”

In addition, the hour was still early, and the shopping streets were still vibrant and packed. A throng of salarymen filled the streets, coming from the direction of Sasazuka's Koushuu Boulevard.

Along the way, they bought the cheapest pork bowl which Suginoia had to offer, and then Maou and Ashiya headed home, going against the flow of human traffic.

“Well, the fact that they can wear neatly-pressed suits in this heat

is pretty impressive.”

“Look, they’re made of ventilated material, see? They’ve been selling them in fairly-priced places like Akayama and AKAKI.”

“I knew that, but ultimately I’d rather not have to wear long-sleeved shirts in summer.”

“Demon King-sama, have you forgotten the time we invaded that desert kingdom in the Southern Continent?”

Ashiya’s face suddenly turned serious.

It was almost seven in the evening, but the long days and short nights meant that the sky was still light, and the lights of the shopping district added to the unique colors of summer as they spilled on to the street.

“Strong sunlight sears the skin, so don’t the desert people cover their bodies in thick cloth? Japan is not that hot, but then again, Earth is fundamentally different from Ente Isla.”

“Why, why did you bring that up all of a sudden?”

Ashiya suddenly spoke passionately about the subject.

“Extended tanning is a cause of skin cancer. Did you know that the thinning of the ozone layer is causing the amount of ultraviolet radiation Japan receives every year to go up?”

“I didn’t. Who cares?”

Ashiya pointed to the sky.

“Ultraviolet radiation continues shining down on us during the evenings and on cloudy days, even when we can’t see the sun. Due to the risk of skin cancer and cataracts near the Antarctic hole in the ozone layer, there are regions in Australia which have even begun issuing sunglasses to children for their protection.”

Despite Ashiya’s ardor, he was still careful enough to keep the pork bowl in his hand from hitting anyone else.

“In summary, wearing short-sleeved outfits in summer is not something that comes highly recommended, even in Japan. Therefore, for the sake of your health, I would be greatly relieved if you were to wear a long-sleeved T-shirt and a pair of sunglasses, Demon King-sama.”

“Long sleeves aside, I’ll pass on the sunglasses, if you don’t mind.”

He had no idea how serious Ashiya was about this, but Maou only thought of it as idle banter, and thus he hurried to change the topic.

“Ah, alright.”

As the crowd on their side of the pedestrian crossing started to move, Ashiya obediently let the matter rest.

The two archfiends chatted as they walked among the Japanese masses, upon the wide sidewalks in front of Sasazuka Station.

“Oh yes, Demon King-sama, did you know about the grill house before this?”

“Eh?”

Ashiya brought the topic up after crossing the road.

“That place is not on your way to and from work. Why did you choose it?”

“Ahhh... well, the fact is that I’ve been there before,” Maou said, and then he hurriedly added, “Someone else treated me, I didn’t use our household funds for it!”

He nervously peeked at Ashiya’s face, but there was only a calm smile there.

“I won’t get mad over something like that.”

That was most definitely a lie. If Maou had said that he had spent his own money, Ashiya would probably lecture him all night and then restrict him to an even more limited menu. Who knew what hid behind what superficial smile?

“In any case, the first time I went there... well, I say that, but today was just the second time... Kisaki-san brought me.”

Kisaki Mayumi. She was the key to the Demon King's Castle's finances, the store leader of McDonald's Hatagaya Station branch.

“I see. I understand. So it was a reward for the employees, then. So that was why you said you didn't need dinner on August 17th and went out, Demon King-sama.”

“It's really scary how you can suddenly rattle off details like that,” Maou frowned.

After crossing the overpass in front of Sasazuka Station, they arrived at a web of alleys which extended through an aged housing district, and the crowds suddenly thinned out.

“Kisaki-san brought me there as part of a welcoming party. It looked like she was a regular there. That night, she and I went there with several people, but Kisaki-san paid for all of it.”

“Indeed, a store leader of legendary generosity. Oh yes, didn't you say it was the first time having offal?”

“Well, the last time I went was on someone else's treat, so I felt a little uneasy and shy, and I didn't really remember what I ate.”

The Demon King should have been a forthright being, yet his words came across as a confession.

“However... I can't really praise Kisaki-san for it.”

For some reason, Maou had a depressed look on his face.

“It was a show of how much she trusts you, Demon King-sama. After all, is it not unprecedented for an employee to be promoted in less than a year?”

Ashiya seemed happy about it for some reason, but Maou instead shook his head weakly.

“Even if you say that, I'm still a part-timer.”

“Well, is it not pleasing that you have managed to dominate several humans within this short span of time?”

“Well, it sounds pretty good when you say it in Japanese... but are you serious about that?”

“If that were not the case, we would not be eating outside. After all, we’re eating out to celebrate your promotion, Demon King-sama.”

“Shift manager?”

Kisaki-san had told him about it after they had closed up and they had changed out of their uniforms.

She had called out to Maou just before he left, and then told him that she wanted him to take on the task of being the afternoon shift manager.

“That means...”

“During that time, you’ll be the store leader, Maa-kun. Of course, your wage will go up as well.”

Acting Store Leader. It sounded really good in his head, and Maou could not hide his excitement.

“The truth is that I’ve got to go to an annoying training seminar for store leaders, run by the regional heads, so I won’t be able to come in at night for about a week, starting next week.”

How much training did one need to master the demon called sales? Maou wondered.

“You’ve been at our company for less than a year, but I think you can handle it, Maa-kun. I also considered asking them to send someone over, but when it comes to appointing someone to handle the store for half the day, I’d rather use someone like you, whom I’ve brought up myself, rather than some idiot employee from elsewhere. How about it, are you in?”

This might reflect poorly on the Demon King of the Demon Realm, but Maou was visibly pleased when he saw the sincere look on Kisaki's face and heard her speak so.

Maou's ambitions for world conquest would spring from becoming a full-time employee. If he could succeed in his duties of being a shift manager, he would be one step further along that road.

"I'll do it! Please let me do it!"

Maou was all fired up. If he could not live up to Kisaki's expectations, he would not only be a disgrace as a man, but even more so as a Demon King.

Therefore, Kisaki was all smiles as she nodded, and then she suddenly changed the topic.

"Oh yes, Maa-kun, you do know that Sentucky Fried Chicken^{|2|} is opening a new outlet beside the bookstore opposite, right?"

"Eh? Ah, yes."

Maou blinked at the sudden topic change.

Their latest rival, Sentucky Fried Chicken, was going to open a store 15 seconds away from the bookshop opposite them. Huge ad posters covered the renovation site and they had even placed leaflets and discount coupons in MgRonald's mail boxes as part of their aggressive marketing campaign.

Kisaki's calm smile had a completely different meaning now. It was like a hunter watching their prey fall into a snare.

"And they're opening on the day I start the seminar. What a pain," Kisaki said as she grit her teeth. While she had not bothered hiding the barbs in her words, Maou could not help but wonder what kind of grudge she bore against Sentucky... that would mean the ad leaflets and coupons had probably gone into the shredder.

As he thought about these things and made the appropriate noises in response, Maou did not instantly parse what Kisaki threw at him.

“Then, Maa-kun, if we end up having fewer customers per night than Sentucky during the week when I’m off for the seminar... I’m docking you 10 yen per head.”

“Eh?”

“If we’re down 10 people, that’s 100 yen! A hundred people means 1000 yen! All from your hourly wage!”

“Wait, what?!”

Maou began to panic, but a ferocious glare that was easily the equal of the Hero’s made him stand himself up straight.

“Silence! As shift manager, what will you do if you can’t prepare yourself for that while handling your duties?!”

“But I’m only getting 1000 yen an hour, right? So if you deduct 1000 yen I’ll be doing it for free, aren’t I? Isn’t there a law about minimum wage...”

“In this shop, I am the constitution!”

Not the law, but the constitution itself. Maou’s head began to spin.

“And doing it for free isn’t bad either. There were people who started around the same time as me who lost to the competition and ended up being shipped off to Trinidad and Tobago. They’re doing their best because they know English.”

“I don’t think that’s the problem...”

“In any case, I appoint you shift manager! Stake your life to defend this store and destroy the interlopers from Sentucky! Defeat is death!”

“But, but how...”

Maou wanted to protest, but Kisaki walked in front of Maou, her arms folded. Kisaki was already a tall person, but in her high-heeled leather shoes, she could look down on him from an even higher vantage. Her pupils seemed to shine with the cruel light of the Demon Realm’s ruler.

“Anything else? You won’t disappoint me, will you? Is that what you’re trying to say, Maa-kun?”

Maou realised he had been baited. But now that he had been pushed to a promise, it was too late to regret it.

As he wondered how to answer, Kisaki’s presence suddenly mellowed out and she resumed her original, balanced smile.

“I have to spur you on as your superior, but handing out rewards is also part of my that role. If you live up to my expectations, don’t you think a reward of some sort is in order?”

“!”

“I could consider another raise depending on the customers and sales figures. With enough accumulated experience, I could even recommend you for a full-time position.”

This was when Maou fell hook, line, and sinker for Kisaki’s trap.

“I’ll do it! I’ll prove that your trust in me isn’t misplaced!”

Kisaki looked very satisfied as she heard that.

“Still... how will they check the number of customers in the enemy shop?”

Maou pondered Kisaki’s words as he asked Ashiya.

“The company will probably send a counter over. When we just came to Japan, I did a short-term jobs like that. It was in the middle of summer too. Just counting passers-by over and over and over... a truly gruelling job in mind and body. *And* I had to buy my own drinks and shade.”

It was hard to believe these words came from a demon who had waged war on mankind in Ente Isla.

“Tell me how they record the weekly receipts and enter them into the shop computers. I’m taking over next week, which is when the

battle for my hourly wage begins. To be honest, I'm a little uncomfortable about this."

"Oh, the Demon King is frightened, what shall we do? Being entrusted with such a great task is a glorious thing. I too was filled with pride when I was appointed the commander of the Eastern Continent invasion force...!"

Ashiya suddenly thumped his chest as he reminisced about the past. A worried Maou raised his voice unnaturally to drown out Ashiya's words.

"Well, ah, it's true! It has to be done. However, because my work hours haven't changed, I'll leave the rest to you."

Once Ente Isla came up, Ashiya would immediately get homesick and urge Maou to return in order to invade Ente Isla.

"Ah, alright, I got it."

Soon, they saw the lights of the Demon King's Castle – or rather, those of the crude wooden apartments known as the Villarosa Sasazuka. Maou breathed a sigh of relief at being able to conclude an annoying conversation.

"Hm?"

"Eh?"

Maou and Ashiya exclaimed in unison.

There were two lights on.

One was a corner room on the second floor; this was Room 201, the Demon King's Castle.

Another one was Room 202, beside the Demon King's Castle. Only Maou should have been staying in the Villarosa Sasazuka. Given the time, it could not have been the workers. Could it be that the landlady Shiba Miki was back?

Shiba Miki was the landlady of the Villarosa Sasazuka. She had hinted that she knew their true identities just before the battle with

Lucifer two months ago, and then she had vanished.

According to the notice on her door, she was overseas, but it was highly unlikely that any landlady would abandon their property to travel for 2 months.

Even so, it was hard to imagine she was doing so in order to move around incognito. She had been sending them mail every two weeks, even when it had been unnecessary.

When the first envelope, luxuriously decorated like a wedding invitation, had reached them, the two of them had carelessly opened it.

From inside fell a letter of flowery prose written in elegant penmanship, on stationery which came from a private beach in Hawaii, as though to flaunt the holiday she was enjoying.

In addition, there was a photo attached. It was a photo of the landlady, holding a tropical cocktail in one hand under a beach umbrella while reclining on a folding chair, advertising her monstrous, wine barrel-like body in a shamelessly explicit pose. She was dressed in a rainbow-colored bohemian-style bikini. Combined with her tanned skin and her rainbow-colored ribbons, she looked like a piece of roasted pork tied up with string.

In the moment they saw this, Maou's vision went blank, Ashiya grabbed his mouth and ran for the toilet, while Urushihara – who had not seen it directly – was bedridden for three days.

The incident convinced them that Japan would be better off being hit with nuclear weapons rather than Shiba Miki. Then another letter arrived unexpectedly, filling the Demon King's Castle with unspeakable anxiety.

As ominous memories of the “landlady's swimsuit photo incident” flashed through Maou's mind, a container truck with a kirin emblem drove past the two of them.

Even the tenants of the Demon King's Castle, which lacked a

television, knew that it was a moving truck. Maou and Ashiya looked at each other.

“Looks like a new resident.”

“Yup. Seems like it’s going to be trouble. It’s only now that I realised how easy life is with all the other rooms empty.”

“Yes. Hopefully the new tenants will be considerate people who don’t make noise and adhere to the garbage disposal days.”

The fact that demons were griping about others’ morals meant that something had gone wrong somewhere.

“Ah – no, I didn’t mean that.”

However, Maou shook his head.

“Really? There’s no deposit needed and rent is very cheap. What sort of people will that attract? Could they be strange people like us when we first came here?”

Maou shook his head to deny Ashiya’s worries.

“Well, it’ll be alright if they’re just of dubious origin. But when you think about it, what is that landlady?”

The word “what” that Maou used made Ashiya think of that ominous picture.

“In any case, they’ll probably live their lives correctly if they do as that landlady-san says.”

“No, I didn’t mean that either... ah, forget it. We can’t do anything about it. Let’s go back quickly, I don’t want Urushihara to complain.”

Saying so, Maou entered the apartment grounds. For some reason, the stairs leading up seemed even more rickety after having struck a fatal blow (metaphorically speaking) to the Hero.

“...Hm?”

Maou noticed a person’s form above him as he mounted the first

step, and he reflexively looked up.

Someone was looking at them, silhouetted by the fluorescent lamps on the second floor.

It was hard to make out details due to the light shining into their eyes, but it seemed to be a petite, slender female.

“Ah...”

Maou’s eyes were unexpectedly drawn in by looking at the person above him. However, the same also seemed to apply for the other party, who seemed to be at a loss for what to do. And then:

“Ah.”

“Ah!”

“Ahhhhh!”

All three of them exclaimed despite themselves. The first was the person above them, followed by Maou, and then Ashiya.

That person began to descend, but slipped on the top step.

Her body hung briefly in the air.

“Are you kidding me?!”

Maou reflexively reached out for her.

It was truly a bizarre form of flight. Her arms and legs flailed wildly as she plunged down on Maou.

“Demon King-sama!” Ashiya exclaimed unconsciously because it looked like she was about to hit him.

“Whoa, that was close.”

The slender, unknown female clung to Maou’s arm, but she did not cry out when falling. In the moment that Maou caught her, it was not clear whether her eyes had gone wide in surprise.

Summer was coming, but she wore a full kimono and a headcloth, apparently in preparation to do something. She was not wearing

shoes, and her socks were not normal socks but two-toed socks. She looked like she had come from an anime, in the character of a mother to some seafood company's heir.

“A-ah...”

Maou nervously looked toward the girl in his arms, who was staring blankly into nothing... or rather, she called out to him.

“Carelessness is a fearsome foe...!”

Saying so, she closed her eyes and went limp in his arms.

“Well, ah, that *is* true, but that's not the problem here,” Maou muttered, making a dig at the unconscious girl.

“Are you alright...?”

Ashiya ran over, after picking up a pair of ladies' wooden sandals which might have fallen off when she slipped.

“Are you talking about me or this girl?”

Ashiya had a worried look on his face as he called out to Maou, but Maou's expression was equally troubled as he responded.

“What should a man do if a girl falls on him from the stairs above?”

“You're late! I'm hungry!”

That complaint assailed Maou, Supreme Overlord of the Demon King's Castle, as he opened the door.

“If you are, then come out. At least greet me with ‘Welcome back, my Master’ or something.”

Maou and Ashiya took off their shoes in the very narrow hallway of the house.

“Oi, Lucifer. Present for you.”

Ashiya stuck the bag with the box of bento into the apartment.

From the apartment came a scrawny teenager, a head shorter than Maou. His violet pupils peeked out from below his long bangs.

“Wait, didn’t you guys get yakiniku? What’s with this Suginoia pork bowl?”

“Ah~ Sorry, Urushihara, household finances are that way.”

The teenager that Ashiya called Lucifer and who Maou called Urushihara followed Maou’s finger as he pointed to Ashiya.

“Why don’t you ask yourself? Your wasteful spending of late is intolerable.”

Ashiya’s tone was rough and his eyes were filled with rage.

It was unclear whether the scolding had any effect, but the teenager dropped the matter despite grumbling about it. He peeled off the plastic bag and the lunchbox cover and then casually tossed it aside.

“Lucifer! Don’t litter in the house! Tidy it up!”

Ashiya picked up the tissue which had flown out of the bag as he fumed at the mess.

“You’d better keep yourself in line! Tidy up the computer area! The snack wrappers and juice cans will attract flies in summer!”

The sky outside had finally darkened from evening to night. The fluorescent light bulb illuminated a short computer desk in the corner of the room, upon which sat an ancient laptop computer. An antiquated fan hummed away behind it.

Surrounding it were empty snack boxes, bags, and juice cans. There were also all manner of devices and cables of unknown provenance.

Crumbs and small pieces of plastic took flight when the fan’s air current hit them. Ashiya’s face began to twitch.

The young man made a face and looked away from Ashiya’s lecture.

“I’m hungry. Save the lecture for after dinner,” he said without any hint of repentance in his voice.

The teenager was called Urushihara Hanzo. His true identity was the Archdemon Lucifer, and he had been hired by Ente Isla to assassinate Maou and the Hero two months ago.

Having lost his demonic magic after a fierce battle, Lucifer had become the Japanese citizen Urushihara Hanzo and returned to his place under Maou’s banner.

Olba had been captured after the aforementioned battle. He had been arrested for possession of a pistol, which was in contravention of the Firearm and Sword Possession Control Law. Linking him to the serial muggings that had taken place over the past few months was only a matter of time after that.

Olba would probably not act up again because he had been drained during the fighting and because the Hero was still in Japan, but it was quite likely that his accomplice Lucifer would do so.

In addition, Lucifer and Urushihara Hanzo looked almost identical in their demonic and human forms, so even after taking care of Olba, Urushihara could not set foot outside of the house.

However, he had developed survival skills through his NEET lifestyle. After witnessing his ability to access the Hero’s workplace through a netcafe, Maou had bought him an internet connection and a laptop in anticipation of his skills.

After that, he had ordered him to gather information on magic-related cultures around the world through the internet.

“So, what valuable information do you have for us today?”

After watching the exchange between Ashiya and Urushihara with a troubled look on his face, Maou called out to Urushihara, whose back was turned to him.

“Useful information isn’t so easy to come by.”

Urushihara was not looking at him. He carried his pork bowl to the computer desk and wolfed it down, which irritated Maou.

“Isn’t that what you’ve been saying for the past two months?!”

Urushihara could not take it any more after hearing that.

“It can’t be helped. One doesn’t just stumble on magic-related information.”

During the time when the Demon King’s Castle had no computer or internet access, Ashiya had been the one who did legwork to collect information on restoring their demonic magic. He looked up any documents he found in the library, attended special exhibitions at famous museums without fail, and went to other museums if their exhibits lined up with the documents he found. However, thanks to the internet, all that was accessible at the click of a button... or so Maou thought.

“Well, that’s Maou for you.”

Urushihara had addressed Maou with the appropriate honorifics when he was Lucifer, but now that he was in human form, some psychological change had happened and now he only addressed Maou by his name. He and Ashiya feuded over this matter about once a week.

“You think anything’s possible with a computer and the internet?”

“Guh...” Maou grunted. It was true – he had thought that way. Seeing his reaction, Lucifer sighed sarcastically.

“You do know the Internet isn’t omnipotent, right? And the laws are getting stricter and stricter recently, you know? Do you want me to do something stupid and get in trouble with the police?”

He had to respond to this.

“Do you even count as a demon now?”

“And do *you* even count as the Demon King, Maou?”

Ashiya was not in the mood to serve as referee. He simply cleared

up Urushihara's mess in silence, with a carefully blank look on his face.

"For instance, I don't think we can simply steal exhibits from a museum's special exhibition, like in Hollywood movies."

"I'm not quite sure what you mean by that example... can't you control security cameras, break the codes on vaults and so on?"

"Why is it that people talk like TV-addicted kids in this household despite us not having a TV?"

Urushihara wielded his tongue without mercy.

"It's true that hackers work by accessing a computer and manipulating data on it, but cracking a fortified system like that of a museum with an outdated laptop like this is impossible."

The laptop which Urushihara thought so lowly of was the first thing Maou had ever bought with a credit card. To Maou, purchasing it had been a momentous occasion, but to Urushihara it was merely a piece of clearance goods from back inventory.

"Take a look at this."

"Ah?"

Urushihara turned the computer display to Maou as he called out to him. The LCD screen displayed a monochrome image of some sort. After watching it cluelessly for a while, the image of a car scrolled through the screen. Just then, the sound of an automobile engine came from outside.

"...Hey, what's this?"

"I used a webcam to serve as a surveillance camera. See that?"

Urushihara pointed outside the window, where a small, ball-link object sat on a railing whose paint had peeled off. A cable went from its brightly-colored plastic exterior to the computer.

"I bought it because it could be useful against suspicious people. It shows a black and white image, though, and there's a bit of a delay

which can't be helped.”

“Even if you explain it like that to me, I still have my doubts. Isn't it an expensive and useful device? Is it alright to leave it outside to get rained on and so on?”

“Nope. It's old and not waterproofed, so you have to bring it in on rainy days.”

“...It can't be helped, I guess.”

Maou turned away, somewhat disappointed, but Urushihara trailed behind him.

“In any case, our opposition is using supercomputer-grade servers with a fully secured network. How do you expect me to take down opposition like that with a computer that has a Pendulum III CPU, a HDD that's less than 100 gigabytes in size, only one USB port and can't even run any common use programs?”

Maou responded to Urushihara's torrent of grievances with one line.

“In Japanese, please.”

It was not that Maou felt Urushihara was denigrating the computer's abilities, but unfortunately Maou had no knowledge about computer products, and had no idea what Urushihara was complaining about.

Urushihara briefly went limp in the face of Maou's ignorance over internet use and his lack of a Demon King's demeanor. In the end, he tiredly poked the laptop's casing.

“In any case, running an ancient machine like this in summer for a long time is going to make it burn out. I can't do anything for now.”

Maou could understand how complex devices were sensitive to heat, so all he could do was keep quiet.

The interior of the Demon King's Castle was bereft of the fruit of

civilization known as an air conditioner. Even opening all the windows would only permit a bit of air flow, so they had to use a fan to circulate the air.

Said fan was a second-hand item purchased for 1000 yen from a recycled goods store. After that, they had bought window shades from a home supplies supermarket to help with the heat.

“Speaking of which, what was that clattering from outside?”

Lucifer was fanning himself with a brochure for a popular game as he asked Maou and Ashiya that question, looking between them as he waited for an answer.

“You mean you were in the house all this time and didn’t know?”

Maou indicated the wall that separated them from the neighboring unit.

“We’ve got a new tenant next door.”

Urushihara looked at the wall in question as he munched on pickled ginger.

“Hah? What, who would want to move to such a crappy apartment?”

This was the moment in which the surveillance camera’s operator proclaimed his own uselessness.

“They should have made some noise opposite, no? The moving truck just came by, and at least one of the hallway windows was open. Didn’t you see the workers or tenants moving around?”

Urushihara shook his head at Ashiya’s words.

“Nope, didn’t see anything.”

“Watching videos with the earphones on again?”

Maou looked depressed as he said so. However, Urushihara shook his head as he took big mouthfuls of his pork bowl.

“I told you I didn’t. I really didn’t notice.”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full! The rice grains will fly out! After that, throw away this useless camera!”

The sight of Urushihara the hikkikomori being lectured by Ashiya on proper manners was quite a common one in the Demon King’s Castle.

“Hell no! I spent 5000 yen on the software and installation!”

Ashiya’s hand slipped as he heard that shocking amount, ripping a hole in the trash bag he had just tied up. Maou knuckled his forehead.

“Does that mean you two met the guy who moved over?”

Maou shrugged at Urushihara’s useless question.

“Well, I don’t know to say whether we saw her or something else.”

The girl who had fallen from the stairs had not come round, regardless of how they spoke to her or smacked her face.

Since there was nothing else to be done, they carried her up to the second floor and found that Room 202 next to theirs was wedged open with the doorstopper.

Inside, they saw the same six-tatami room as the Demon King’s Castle. New cardboard boxes were strewn everywhere. There was also an expensive-looking cabinet and something which looked like a brazier.

Not only did she look traditionally Japanese, even the way she lived seemed strongly traditional.

Maou and Ashiya glanced at each other as they realized they had stepped into the room of an unusual girl who lived by herself. Then, they laid her flat in the center of the room.

Seeing that her eyes was still closed but she was still breathing, Maou and Ashiya decided to observe her for the moment and call an ambulance if she remained unconscious. Then, they left the house.

They removed the doorstopper, but of course they could not lock the door from the outside.

“Young girls do have a lot of things. Her room is full of cardboard boxes.”

“She lives next door, so she can find out about us effortlessly. For safety’s sake, we should avoid dealing with her too much.”

After Ashiya punched him a few times, Urushihara finished his pork bowl with tears in his eyes, and then said: “A young girl, huh. How strange that she would move to a place like this.”

He dumped the empty paper box into the trash bag.

“I told you to rinse these before throwing them away, didn’t I? How many times do I have to tell you that they stink when you leave them out for several days until trash collection day comes?!”

Ashiya’s anger built again.

Urushihara had an annoyed look on his face as he reluctantly went to wash the bento box. After that, Ashiya got mad at him again for not separating the flammable and inflammable rubbish, but Urushihara was not having it. Instead: “Ahhhhh, that’s enough! Bathing’s more important! It’s already dark outside!”

He uttered those words in the same lackadaisical manner as always.

The Villarosa Sasazuka’s rent was so cheap because it did not have an included bathroom, but being unable to bathe in the hot and humid summer would lead to filthiness and health problems.

Urushihara, who was forbidden to leave the house, typically left the house at night, covering up his hair with a hat, and went to the nearby bathhouse with Maou and Ashiya.

“Honestly... Wait, we’ll go after brushing our teeth. Also, take out your ticket.”

As Ashiya gave Urushihara his marching orders, he took out his

own toothbrush.

“Salutations.”

The three demons looked at each other.

It was a female voice. They looked as one to the door, and then the doorbell rang.

Speak of the devil and he will come, huh. While Maou was relieved that she had woken up, he was naturally nervous about meeting an unknown neighbor.

“What, what should we do?”

Maou seemed a little worried, but his subordinates were merciless.

“Demon King-sama, I believe you are the master of this household.”

“Maou, your name’s on the door, isn’t it? Go out there.”

Such passionate encouragement!

Maou glared at the two of them, calmed his breathing, and then responded to the visitor outside.

“Yes, yes, I’m coming.”

Carefully hiding his nervousness, Maou opened the door and there stood—

“Forgive my visit at such a late hour. I am Kamazuki Suzuno, and I have moved into the domicile alongside yours this day.”

—A gigantic cardboard box, greeting him politely.

“...”

The box was labelled “Udon【Commercial Grade】.”

“Ah.”

“Earlier—”

The slow-tongued cardboard box spoke again.

“I apologize for the unsightly nature of our first encounter, and for the trouble I have caused. You have my utmost gratitude.”

And so, the slow-tongued cardboard box called Kamazuki Suzuno bowed to Maou at a perfect angle.

“Ut-utmost gratitude? Ah, no, it wasn’t a big deal... anyway, pleased to meet you. I’m Maou Sadao.”

Maou had no choice but to bow to the commercial-grade udon.

“Please accept this as a token of my sincerity. It is a gift I obtained from the moving company; a mere trifle.”

Saying so, the cardboard box stepped forward... no, it extended forward.

“Ah... this is...”

“I have heard that noodles are most appropriate when meeting and greeting one’s new neighbors.”

Neither the contents or amount seemed appropriate in any way, but if this was all udon, then the Demon King’s Castle would be in possession of an unprecedented amount of rations.

“Ah, ahhh, thanks for bringing these all the way here.”

There was a note of confusion in Maou’s voice as he took the box while thanking it.

“It’s heavy!”

It was so heavy, in fact, that the box almost fell.

When one thought about it, a cardboard box that was the size of the Demon King’s Castle’s doorway which was then stuffed full of udon would have to weigh dozens of kilograms.

He was surprised, but Maou did his best to bear with it as he slowly lowered the cardboard box to the ground before looking at the visitor once more.

“It would please me if they were to your taste. I pray you will

accept them.”

The girl looking between Maou’s arms looked different from just now; she wore a traditional-looking yukata which was made of superior materials, and she was wearing a pair of wooden sandals.

“I have only just moved to this place from my rural domicile, and so I am not used to the rigors of city life. I fear I may continue inconveniencing you in future, but I hope we can get along as neighbors.”

The petite girl who called herself Kamazuki Suzuno bowed deeply, at a perfect angle.

“Ah, yes, uh, well, same here.”

Maou’s response lagged behind a little and then he bowed in a similar way to hers.

The image this girl projected did not suit her at all.

He surmised that she was a weirdo from that scream on the stairs, but after speaking to her again, that impression was further reinforced.

She had a high-bridged nose and wide eyes, snow-white skin and lustrous raven hair, and her blue yukata went well with her golden yellow obi. She held herself upright without any wasted effort; truly an immaculate standing posture.

Her stern and strong expression added a certain dignity to the way she stood.

However, the fact that she looked like a middle-schooler, yet was primly attired in traditional dress and had exquisite manners combined with her vocabulary, made Maou wonder if she had come to Sasazuka by way of time machine.

As she stood back up, even Maou, who was not familiar with such things, could tell that she had an exquisitely-made accessory in her hair; a four petaled flower set into a red hairclip, which gleamed

elegantly.



And while it was summer, and there were now more ladies in grand and pretty yukatas walking on the street, this was clearly the posture of “someone who wore yukatas often”.

As she raised her head, Suzuno stared at Maou’s face with a pair of eyes that were as keen as a blade. It lasted for only a few seconds, but Maou backed down.

“Are you... Maou Sadao?”

“Eh? Ah, yes, yes I am.”

Suzuno fell into thought, like she had realised something. She lowered her eyes, then lifted her head again.

“Do you live with someone called Ashiya Shiro?”

“Eh?”

Maou reflexively looked back into the house, and saw a look of surprise on Ashiya’s face as he looked toward the doorway.

“Ah, I’m Ashiya, and I rent this apartment with my old friend Maou...”

“Pleased to meet you. My name is Kamazuki, and I have heard a little about you.”

Who did you hear it from? What did you hear from them? As she saw Maou and Ashiya glancing at each other, Suzuno’s expression changed for the first time.

The space between her brows narrowed, as though she were in difficulty.

“I have not met the landlady here in person, but through the real estate agent, I obtained a letter from the landlady saying that the only residents here were one Maou Sadao and his friend.”

Saying so, Suzuno produced a lavish-looking envelope that was immediately familiar to Maou and the others from an inner pocket. This was the first time they had ever seen someone take something

out from such a place.

“This letter says that the people who stay here are of excellent moral character and that I can come to you with anything which might be troubling me.”

What a deplorable assessment for a Demon King and a band of demons.

In addition, Maou had no intention of taking on the tasks which should have been performed by the manager of the Villarosa Sasazuka. Surely telling a new resident all that was terribly irresponsible of the landlady Shiba, was it not?

“Ahhh, also, she included a picture, but I’m not sure if this is really the landlady...”

Suzuno began to reach into the envelope to take something out, as though she had suddenly thought of something.

“No! There’s no need! You don’t have to take it out! It’s fine! You can tell even without looking! If you doubt that the creature in that picture is human, I can tell you that it is the landlady!”

Maou could not help but use all his strength in stopping her. Suzuno seemed a little speechless at how panicked he looked.

“What worries you so? She wears a swimsuit, a swimming inner tube, and colored glasses...”

“There’s no need to explain!”

In the end, Ashiya had fled back into the room.

Maou breathed a sigh of relief as she put the picture back into the envelope. Had the impact been softer on her because the landlady was a fellow woman? No, that raised new questions, such as whether the landlady counted as a female. However, learning the answer would do him no good, so Maou promptly stamped his memories of the “Landlady’s Swimwear Picture Incident” with an X and sealed it under a Top Secret designation.

“Ah – Well, in any case, I’m glad you weren’t hurt. Also, thanks for the udon. I work at the nearby McGonald’s so I may not be in for some times of the day, but if you have any problems, this chap will be at home all the time.”

Maou had recovered from his terror in an instant, and now his tone toward Suzuno was considerably gentler.

“Well, there’s not girls around, but it’s not a filthy place by any means. Come to us if anything is giving you trouble.”

Ashiya executed a polite bow from inside the house.

“Ah, ahh... then, when the time comes, I shall be counting on you.”

Suzuno bowed to Maou, a look of faint surprise in her eyes. However, her face was too stiff for him to read, so he did not know the reason for it.

“Ah – but this weirdo is too suspicious, so please refuse him if he gets to annoying.”

It would be best to be careful around a female neighbor who’s trying to get close from the beginning, Maou thought.

Recently, men with unclear good intentions were bad news.

“Ah, no, while it is unexpected, it is quite reassuring to have reliable neighbors. I hope you will teach me the ways of communal living.”

He had no idea what was so surprising, but he had heard that “communal living” word in the end. Maou thought that perhaps the first thing she should learn was the appropriate vocabulary.

However, Suzuno seemed entirely concerned about these things as she bowed again. Then, as she looked at Maou’s feet, she drew a tiny breath.

“Is there someone else?”

“Eh?”

“Ah, no, it is because I saw a pair of differently-sized shoes on the ground. I apologize if I have disturbed you while you were entertaining guests.”

“Ahh, no...”

Maou and Ashiya exchanged wordless looks. Keeping the existence of a tenant a secret from a neighbor would be suspicious, and Urushihara had not gone out of his way to eavesdrop on others. Thus, it would be better to show their hand now than be caught out later on for being careless.

“Ah, we’ve recently gained another resident, but he’s an extreme hikkikomori, so there’s no need to worry.”

“Don’t go around calling me a hikkikomori! I’m Urushihara! Pleased to meet you!”

Urushihara’s shout echoed from within the house. Did he really know that it was better that he not appear in front of others?

“I see... I hope we will get along.”

Her eyes clouded over with uneasiness.

She had not been confused even during her spectacular flight from the staircase, but the mere existence of a NEET had done this to her.

Was it so strange to have three men living under the same roof?

Still, it only lasted for a moment. Suzuno looked in the direction of Urushihara and bowed slightly.

“Then, let us leave things at this for today, given that lingering overlong would be discourteous. Do call on me as you wish in future.”

With that, Suzuno returned, her sandals clacking across the ground until she returned to the next door room.

After making sure that she had closed the door, Ashiya cross his arms in confusion.

“What a strange person.”

“You’re one to call someone strange. Still, it’s good that we met our neighbor, and she even gave us free food.”

Saying so, he lifted the case of udon at his feet to his waist.

“Damn, but this is heavy,” he quietly grumbled.

The cardboard box occupied a corner of the room, and its size in their living space made it feel very cramped.

In any event, there were now three huge cardboard boxes in a corner of the room. The room’s layout and the position of the furniture meant that it was the only place for them to go, but as a result they could only open one door of the wall cabinets.

A week later, it was a humid and swelteringly hot Monday.

Emi was dressed in the casual clothes she wore to and from work, and she raised her hand to her forehead as she sighed in annoyance. She had actually been planning to take a bath after returning home, but Sasuke Delivery^{|3|} seemed to have chosen this moment to come.

In any case, she needed to install an air conditioner to deal with the damnable heat. Emi swiped away the strands of hair that were stuck to her forehead with sweat and read the receipt she had been given.

The sender field was covered in script which looked like a mass of earthworms. The katakana read “Emerada” and the content field read “food”.

After fumbling around in front of the table, Emi made up her mind, picked up the cell phone on the table and dialled a number.

『“...Hi~ It’s me, Emerada Etuva~”』

EMi had to wait seven rings before she could get through, so her tone was stiffer than usual.

“I know. I’m Emi... no, Emilia.”

『Yup~ I feel tense no matter how many times I do it~』

“Aren’t you used to this by now?” Emi asked with a wry grin. Of course, she was not being serious. One could not expect the person on the other end of the call to get used to “electronic communication”.

One could say that the woman called Emerada Etuva did not exist in Japan. Or rather, she did not even exist on Earth.

『It’s because I haven’t lived for a long time in Japan~』

Emi studied the huge pile of boxes before her.

“What exactly are these things you sent in your name...”

Each of the three boxes looked very heavy. The Sasuke Deliveryman had brought them into the house out of concern for Emi’s slender wrists.

“The delivery receipt says it’s food...”

『Ah~ so you got it? Wonderful~ It’s so fast~ I sent it out yesterday~』

She was clearly amazed by her first contact with such speedy cargo transport services.

『That’s processed holy magic in a palatable form which can be stored in Japan~』

“Holy... what?”

Emi banged on the table.

“Is, is that the food you were talking about? It looks heavy, is it rice or something?”

“Ry-su...? Ahhh, an important staple food in Japan~ Nope~ It’s easy to manage and can be kept in small portions~ even in Japan,

drinking this will fill you with energy~ it seems to be quite famous~”

“When I drink it, my energy will...?”

It all seemed quite mysterious, but when she opened the box after tearing off the address slip on top and throwing it aside, what she saw was—

“Uwah...”

The huge cardboard box was filled with smaller boxes, each of which was labelled with the name of a Japanese pharmaceutical firm. She opened one to see, and as she expected, there were ten brown glass bottles, each with a metal cap.

“What does this Holy Vitamin B stand for?”

『No~ It's not B, but β~ It's an experimental product~ Something of a beta-test~』

“...Well, it doesn't matter... so you're saying that I can restore my holy magic if I drink this?”

『Yup~ Oh, and Emilia~』

The voice on the other end of the line interrupted her, as though it were leaning its head forward.

『What do you think of the Demon King recently~?』

“...Yeah, him.”

After some thought, Emi replied:

“There haven't been any changes so far. We basically argue every time we meet. However, we're both very busy, so we've been keeping to ourselves.

『...』

Emerada seemed to be hesitating about something.

『Emilia~ Do you know what you're saying?』

“Eh?”

Emi’s response was swift and reflexive, while Emerada’s explanation sounded like she was picking her words very carefully.

『Ah~ A lot of lovers complain about their schedules not syncing up~』

No, she was not picking them at all. She was firing a straight ball right down the center of the strike zone.

Because of Emerada’s words, Emi went over what she had said again.

“No... what... that...”

She began panicking into the headset.

“What are you *saying*, Eme?! You of all people should know it’s not that way, right?! We both work Japanese jobs to earn Japanese money, so both of us have to obey Japan’s laws while we live in Japan! I can’t keep my eye on him all the time! Honestly!”

『I know, I know~』

Emerada’s laughter came through the headset, while Emi’s breathing was ragged with anger.

“Quit kidding around! I’m the Hero of Ente Isla and he’s the Demon King! No matter the circumstances he’s my enemy! Just, just thinking about us being *lovers* makes me mad!”

Indeed, the person calling herself Yusa Emi was the Hero Emilia Justina, who had brought peace to Ente Isla, the Continent of the Holy Cross, by exterminating the Demon Army led by the Demon King Satan.

The Demon King Satan had become Maou Sadao, who worked in the Hatagaya Station Branch of McGonald’s, while Emi had also become the Japanese person Yusa Emi, working as a customer service operator for a certain mobile phone company under the DoCoDeMo umbrella.

Emerada Etuva, the person on the other side of the phone, was one of Emi's travelling companions, who had come to Japan two months ago during the battle with Lucifer to follow Emilia, who had herself ended up in Japan after following the Demon King there. She was a Court Sorceress of the St Aire's Empire, the largest nation on Ente Isla's Western Continent.

After the battle with Lucifer, Emi had gained the ability to return to Ente Isla with the help of Emerada and her friend Alberto, unlike in Maou's case.

In addition, she had given Emerada and Alberto a communication catalyst that was better known as a "cell phone", in order to avoid their messages reaching the wrong ears. Thus, they could share information in greater detail.

"Really... still, I've slacked off on my observations recently. I'll try a bottle of this holy power stuff and see how that works. Where can I file a claim for the transport expenses I'm wasting on him?"

A long time ago, she had been lectured at a police post with Maou and the two of them had been mistaken for a couple. That old wound still ached in her heart, and bringing it up made her very angry.

『What~ I didn't really get it~ Still, I'm relieved~』Emerada said as she changed her tone.

"Eme?"

『I'm counting on you, Emilia~』

Emerada's relaxed drawl suddenly changed to an emphasis on each word.

『Please~ Don't do anything that'll make me your enemy, Emilia~』

"..."

Emi sucked in a breath. She had not expected that at all.

『That's my request as someone who understands Emi~, Japan~

and Maou~』

Emerada's voice was very gentle. That was why the meaning in her words was so weighty.

“I'll be careful of that. Don't worry, I'm the Hero, after all. I swear on the name of my parents that I will not do anything wrong.”

『That's a relief.』

Her father Nord, who had perished amidst the flames of the battle between humanity and demonkind. And then—

『I've met your mother, Emilia. She's a really nice person~』

“Well, angels are expected to be good people.”

Her mother – the Archangel Lailah.

It was her blood that had become the strength of the Hero Emilia Justina, a half-angel child of a human being and an angel.

“How's that side been recently? It's odd enough that things are peaceful over here with the Demon King, but how are things with the Holy Church and the armies of the various kingdoms?”

『Oh yeah.』

The sound of paper rustling came from the telephone.

『The plot to kill you and the Demon King was the idea of a few people in the upper echelons of the Holy Church~ never mind that you were the Hero who saved the world, Emilia~ So right now, none of the countries have begun to openly dispatch their forces.』

Emi did not miss Emerada's subtle choice of words.

“Openly, you say.”

『Yup~ that's it~』

She could sense Emerada smiling bitterly over the line.

『Even if the major countries haven't taken any action yet, the influential nobles and the smaller nations who want to curry favor

with the Holy Church are starting to smell like a powderkeg.』

“Seems like I’ve offended a lot of powerful people.”

『You can’t talk sense into brainless authority figures who only want to protect themselves.』

After casually dropping that scathing criticism, Emerada continued: 『There have been requests to assassinate guilds~ And secret withdrawals of funds~ And rumors that a Doctrinal Correction Council has been convened~ but those are just rumors~』

“A Doctrinal Correction Council... what is that?”

It was not a familiar term, so Emi was confused. Emerada seemed to sense it and explained all over again.

『Ah~ Sorry~ That would be an Inquisition~ They seem to have changed the name recently~』

“Hmm? An Inquisition... Well, no matter how you think about it, as a human, I won’t be a target. What other heretics are there for them to hunt down beside the Demon King? Why are these rumors going around?”

『Olba can’t come back, can he?』

Olba Meyer was a member of the Six Archbishops and one of the Holy Church’s highest-ranking clergymen. The Six Archbishops was the name of the Holy Church’s decision-making body, and the six members had great power and authority within the Church.

Olba Meyer had joined Emilia on her journey through Ente Isla, and his portfolio was in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He was a very experienced preacher to other nations.

Emilia’s travels had begun from the Western Continent, where the Holy Church was the strongest. Emilia did not have much experience with the outside world, so Olba, with his extensive knowledge of the countries where the Church’s influence was weak, was an ideal travelling companion on her journey to exterminate

the Demon King.

The Inquisition was something of a special organization within the ministries of the Church. The ministries included those who scouted out places for missions, those who disciplined the younger clergymen who acted in a wayward manner during their training, those who developed knowledge with the theologians of the Church, and many other such basic, boring, and unobtrusive tasks.

On the other hand, there was the religious police of the Church. Their trials for extremism resulted in many people being executed for heresy every year, so they left a grim impression on others.

『The Ministry of Missions seem to be looking for the reason why Olba went missing~ They might have people who could sense you, Emilia~ So no matter what, please don't be careless~ There might be some of them who'll come to Japan in their eagerness to win credit for themselves~ 』

“I'll be careful. Are you and Al alright?”

『We went too far last time, now they're keeping us under strict surveillance~ We can't do much more than that~』

“Well, the Hero's party can't relax no matter the circumstances.”

『Yup~』

Emerada and Alberto were not the sort of weak people who could be killed by half-baked assassins, so if they said they were fine, all Emi could do was trust them.

『That's it, then~ the fees will rack up if we talk for too long~ I'll be hanging up now~』

“It's only a basic call charge. The phone is just a medium; we're talking through an Idea Link.”

『But what if we end up spending money~ It would be a shame if you went broke because of your phone bill~』

“I'll be careful. Anyway, thanks for the holy magic. Say hi to

Alberto for me.”

Just as Emi was about to hang up, Emerada suddenly called out to her in a panicked voice.

『Sorry, I forgot to tell you~ Be careful of how much Holy Vitamin-β you use~』

“The dosage? Is there a limit on how much I can take or something?”

She turned the small bottle in her hand, and the place which should have listed its ingredients instead read: “Holy Magic”.

『Yup~ After all, no matter how you slice it, we’ve never tried converting naturally respired holy magic into a substance that can be purposefully ingested before this.』

“Ah...”

『That said, it’s still a β model~ You’re the first human test subject~ So two bottles a day, morning and afternoon, should be your limit. But you can’t take two in the afternoon if you miss one in the morning~ 』

“...There’s a lot I want to say, but I get it.”

『Okay~ Please remember the appropriate usage and dose limits~ Seeya~』

This time, Emerada hung up properly. Emi put her phone on the table, feeling a little confused.

She had written out a bill saying Emerada in the katakana she disliked. She used cardboard boxes from Sasuke Delivery. Her speech cleverly incorporated a lot of references to Japanese culture and practices. She should only have been in Japan for a while...

“Where is that girl now?”

Still confused, Emi studied the bottle in her hand.

“Let’s try one.”

She twisted off the metal cap and peeled off the seal. A sweet, medicinal scent wafted out into the air.

She gingerly licked at it.

“Isn’t this a health drink? Will it really work?”

It even had the slightly unpleasant aftertaste health drinks left on the tongue after the initial tangy flavor.

Still, she had to trust in Emerada, even if it looked, smelled, and tasted like a mysterious health drink one could buy from a pharmacy.

It would be bad if she ended up with too much taurine.

After the arduous process of drinking an entire bottle, she felt like she had swallowed some kind of spicy food. The yellowish taste of vitamins floated up and she felt full of energy, but she had the feeling that overuse of it would be bad for her body.

It was supposed to be holy magic, but there had not been any dramatic changes after taking it. Just as she was about to throw it into the kitchen’s trashcan, her eyes stopped at a corner of her vision. Something seemed to have fallen messily.

“Ah...”

When she had opened the cardboard box, the strip of sticky tape she had thrown out had ended up sticking to the cover of one of the magazines beside the television.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

With a wail of pain, Emi ran over to the magazine.

“And it was a rare Mito Fukushogun-sama cover too...”^{|4|}

She tried to slowly peel the tape off, but the bond was strong and she ended up tearing the photo cover.

“I can’t get depressed about this sort of thing!”

Tomorrow was the long-awaited day when she would barge into

the Demon King's Castle. She had already told Emerada that the battle would be greatly affected by her mental state. Charging into enemy lines with a weak mind might result in her taking a counterattack instead!

Having psyched herself up, she threw the magazine and tape into the flammable rubbish bin.

"...Still, I don't have the energy to make dinner. Curry it is, then."

However angrily she might have risen, her steps to the kitchen were slow and weak. She pulled out a packet of her favorite precooked "Kawasaki General Curry" and a pack of precooked "Goto Rice".

She poured the curry onto a plate, put it into the microwave, selected 'High', and turned the timer to two minutes.

Emi felt like she had to watch it cool, and so before her eyes, the microwave tray made a low rumbling as it turned.

As she thought about her promise to visit the Demon King of that beaten-up apartment, she began to feel hurt.

"...Am I even a Hero? I'm still a Hero even if I used the microwave to make curry, aren't I?"

In response to Emi's pointless question, the microwave went beep.

After glaring angrily at the hard working microwave, Emi opened the package of precooked rice and let it spin in the microwave for another two minutes.

"Still, life would have been much easier on my travels if I had instant food and a microwave. I should bring one back to the other side. I guess you could power it with lightning spells, right? But are lightning spells AC or DC?"

Emi had not noticed that recently, the focus of her worries had slowly been drifting away from exterminating the Demon King.

Thanks to the power of technology, the smell of curry rice wafted

out before it was even 40% done. It helped soften her expression.

“Ahhh, that’s right! I’m out of shampoo–”

She decided to buy more shampoo after eating.

“Eh, isn’t it time for the interesting programs yet – Ah, they’re showing Mito Fukushogun today!”

Saying so, she inspected the calendar on the wall while nodding to herself.

Emi had also not noticed she was talking to herself a lot more.

Emi breathed a sigh of relief as the ticket vending machine spat out her PASMO |5| card with an electronic tone.

“Fortunately Sasazuka and Hatagaya are both within range of the monthly pass.”

Emi used a monthly pass to travel to work from Eifukucho to Shinjuku, so she could board or alight as much as she liked at Sasazuka and Hatagaya. In this way, Emi’s workplace of DoCoDeMo had supplied the necessary expenses to slay the Demon King.

In the end, Emi got down at Sasazuka. She got herself a ticket stub and tucked it carefully into her wallet before walking out of the station with heavy steps.

“Why is every day so hot...”

Emi, who had just emerged from the station under the overpass, was bombarded by the light of the sun, which was still searing hot even though it was only morning.

The passion she had declared to Emerada about checking out the Demon King’s forces was very nearly incinerated by the heat above her head.

In any case, every day was very hot.

It should not have been anything compared to the campaign to

defeat Malacoda, commander of the Demon Army on the Southern Continent, given that one could buy drinks along the street for 120 yen and cool off in the air-conditioning of nearby coffee shops. Even so, heat was heat.

Emi took out a floral-patterned folding umbrella from her handbag, and she wiped her face with a handkerchief as she set down the road to the Demon King's Castle.

She had been spying on the Demon King every day since Emerada had sent her the Holy Vitamin β energy drink to replenish her holy magic. Today was the fourth day. It took a great deal of patience to carry out interminable work like this which held no promise of paying off.

The first day had been spent observing Maou from the bookstore opposite his workplace, where she had finished all the browsing-only books. She had gone to the Demon King's Castle on the second day, but all she had found were the extremely normal sounds of daily life. She had also seen Alciel – who seemed tired for some reason – buying onions, soup stock, packets of quick-brew matcha tea, and triangular waterproof bags. She had not come on the third day because of work.

“I’m... basically a stalker, aren’t I?” Emi groused as she wetted her throat with a bottle of mineral water.

Observing someone's life and workplace with no objective day in and day out was the very portrait of a stalker.

Had the Demon King not spent the past two months in Sasazuka, work reasons aside?

And so, the fourth day – which was today – ended fruitlessly, with the weekend looming ahead.

There was a lot of work on Fridays, so Emi felt that it would be better to mount her surveillance in the morning rather than do so after work, when she was tired. However, the energy-sapping heat informed her of her spectacular miscalculation.

“No, no, I need to think! The Demon King works, eats, and sleeps! That’s a good thing, isn’t it?!”

She cheered herself up like this as she walked along the canal toward the Sasazuka residential district.

“Still, the more I think about it, the more I feel like a stalker harassing a bachelor living a perfectly normal life.”

As she said that, her thoughts spiralled down into depression.

Once the Demon King’s Castle was in sight, Emi quickly checked that the bottle of Holy Vitamin β was in her handbag.

She did not need it today, but she suspected that she might need it in future.

More to the point, she was suspicious over whether it would work when it was needed.

“I’ll go back immediately after making sure... well, it’s still early, so the Demon King is probably still asleep.”

Emi had not looked very motivated until she arrived. However, she now folded up her umbrella, kept it in her handbag, and silently infiltrated the land encircled by the concrete walls of the Villarosa Sasazuka. From there, she tried to spy on the conditions in Room 201.

The Demon King’s Castle had no air conditioning, so they usually kept their windows open, and any conversations within were perfectly audible from outside. Of course, they did not usually raise their voices, so she could not tell what they were talking about.

Just once, she had heard Ashiya, the human form of the Archdemon Alciel, lecturing Urushihara, Lucifer’s human form. The lecture had been futile, but even after getting so close to listen in, she had nothing to show for it.

“So today’s laundry day, huh. That’s a pretty messy way of drying clothes.”

The washed clothes and towels were simply draped over the window drying racks, wrinkles and all. As she stood there and spaced out, time passed steadily and all the water she had brought was gone.

“...So there was nothing after all, huh... Well, it might be early, but let’s head off to work.”

Just as she muttered this, just as she was about to go—

“Honestly, have you never hung out washed clothes to dry? You really have no idea how to do housework, do you now, Hanzodono?”

“?! ”

Emi wanted to praise the wall outside the apartment for hiding her form.

She had frozen up for a moment due to the sudden voice, but her body moved on its own to a safe spot, and from there she probed the situation.

“They will lose their shape if you dry them when they are crumpled, and even when they do dry they will be wrinkled. You need to know how to do these things.”

Emi produced a hand mirror and spied on the second floor.

“What? What’s this...?”

It was a girl.

What was this girl she had never seen before doing, stretching out each piece of wrinkled clothing within the Demon King’s Castle?

“And this towel needs to be re-hung. Spread it open and pin it with clothespins. If it falls, you will have to wash it all over again.”

“Yes, yes, sorry~”

That reluctant male voice belonged to Urushihara.

She was not seeing things, nor was it an illusion. There was a girl

in a kimono in the Demon King's Castle.

“...In any case, nobody lives on the first floor, right?”

Emi slowly inched forward along the wall, and after making sure that nobody was looking down from the window, she ducked below the wooden eave under Room 201. This way, they would not see her even if they looked downwards.

“Ahhhhh – are you quite done yet? It's like there's another Ashiya in here.”

“You are too slothful, Hanzo-dono. If you insist on being a shut-in, then at least help with the housework.”

“Again... you... ah...”

She thought she could hear snatches of Ashiya's voice mixed with the conversation between the girl and Urushihara, but it was on the other side of the window, so she could not make it out.

Emi concentrated to try and hear them, while the girl's and Urushihara's voices grew softer. And then—

“Wait... why now... b-be quiet!”

The original residents of the eave where Emi was hiding, countless cicadas, began making a lot of noise.

Ji~ Ji~ Kana~ Kana~ Min~ Min~ Shawa~ Shik~ Shik~

It was hard to imagine a simple piece of wood could house so many different types of cicadas. They lived their whole lives for the summer, and they were pouring themselves into this impromptu chorus.

And then, something light fell on Emi's head. When she reflexively reached up to touch it, she found that it was a discarded cicada skin.

“...They're treating me like an idiot. There seems to be something else in it too...”

Emi grumbled in an annoyed tone, swiping away the cicada shells

that fell on her skin. Even the Hero of Ente Isla who was proficient in all languages could not speak to the hearts of cicadas.

Emi gave up on trying to stop the cicadas' calling, and tried to figure out her next move.

This was the biggest change in these four days. She could not go back without learning all the details. For all she knew, that girl was a new demon which Emi did not know of.

Given she had been going on and on about clothing, Emi knew that she was not an immediate threat to her surroundings. However, she did not think someone like that could be left unattended.

“It’s a little dangerous, but it can’t be helped.”

She decided to step out from under the window and moved to the public staircase.

Then, she carefully ascended the steps in order not to make noise. Since it was before work, she was wearing boat shoes, and so she held onto the railing in order not to fall like last time.

By the time she made it to the top while holding her breath, her forehead was beaded with sweat.

The windows facing the public corridor were open, probably for ventilation.

“Really? But what if you don’t do it properly, Hanzo-dono?”

The voice belonged to that girl from just now. Emi squatted under the window and peeked inside.

“All right. First, you slice the onions, crush the ginger, and dissolve the soup stock in cold water. Then all you need to do is cook the udon and breakfast is ready. You can make a nice cold udon if you quickly dunk it in cold water after cooking. It would be even better with an egg.”

“I’m so hungry~ everyone’s making udon even though it’s

summer~”

“Shiro-dono makes meals like these every day. Do you not think you should know as—”

For some reason, it felt like a continuation of the girl’s lecture on the laundry from just now.

“Why don’t you tell him, Kamazuki-san, he won’t listen to his own people...”

Finally, she heard Ashiya’s voice. So the girl’s name was Kamazuki-san. Ashiya’s voice sounded a little deflated. It bothered Emi for some reason...

“I shall do it today, so watch carefully. From tomorrow onwards, you must properly train yourself to avoid censure from Shiro-dono. Come, go crush some ginger. At the very least, you must know how to work the cutting board.”

“Yes – eh? Ashiya, are we out of ginger?”

There was the sound of the refrigerator opening, followed by a question from Urushihara. Ashiya lifelessly answered: “I told you, we used it all up yesterday. Sorry, Kamazuki-san, but we only have onions... Urushihara, close the fridge door properly!”

Only those last words sounded like they had strength in them.

“Hmm, no ginger, then. Still, that means there will not be much nutritional value to the meal. I believe I have some ginger in the vegetables I brought back. Shall I bring it over?”

All Emi knew was that this Kamazuki girl was cooking in the Demon King’s Castle, which made her wonder how she had gotten to know its residents.

However, Emi did not have the time to calmly ponder this.

The girl’s voice seemed to be heading to the doorway. Was she about to step outside? Emi grumbled to herself, but there was nowhere nearby for her to hide.

“Hanzo-dono, please do not allow the noodles to stick together until I return. Take care to prise them open slowly with the chopsticks.”

“Yes, yes, yes–”

“Answering once will suffice! Then, I shall return forthwith.”

The door rattled.

She’s coming out!

Emi had no time to consider where the girl’s room was. She had to get out of here right now.

Her panic made her feet slip.

“Ah...”

By the time Emi had realised it, she had slipped on the top step and slid into open air, to the sound of cicadas chirping in the morning.

From the corner of her vision, she saw the contents of her handbag – her cell phone, wallet, monthly train pass, folding umbrella, half-read light novel, makeup pouch, mirror, handkerchief, notebook, bottle of Holy Vitamin β, toothpick case, tissue paper pouch borrowed from work, pencil case, and a stick of lip balm for some reason – flying merrily through the air.

“Nooooooooooooooooo!”

In the instant that she realised her situation, Emi’s body began falling heavily to the earth. She had no idea how she had slipped, but she did know that if she fell in such a clumsy way, she might end up being very badly hurt. All she could do was prepare for the impact and hope for the best.

“Uoooooh?!”

There was a weak, gentle impact, and then her fall was halted.

She had reflexively shut her eyes, but there was none of the

expected pain, just the clattering of various objects falling to the ground.

“God dammit that *hurts*—”

There was a familiar groaning coming from somewhere by her ear.

She nervously opened her eyes, and—

“...Can’t you just walk down the staircase without causing any trouble?”

Before her was the Demon King – no, Maou. For some reason, he had a look of regret on his face.

“Really, I save you, and I suffer for it. Can’t look forward to anything you’re bringing me.”

“De-Demon King!” Emi screamed. Having lost control of the situation, she nervously looked around.

The small items from her bag were scattered everywhere, and the tissue paper pouch adorned Maou’s head. Then, Emi suddenly said: “Put put put put put me down! Someone, help! Wait, w-what?!”

Emi felt like all the blood in her body was boiling at once. Why was she in Maou’s arms?

The fact was that Maou had caught Emi as she fell, but the fact that she had been saved by him and then swept up in a princess carry was an unbearable disgrace for the Hero.

The sweltering heat and the fact that Maou had seen this shameful display of hers brought her embarrassment to its zenith.

“Hurry, hurry, hurry up and put me down! What, what are you trying to do to me?!”

Emi’s face turned red, and she began thrashing her arms and legs, heedless to the situation.

“*You* were the one who fell down all of a sudden... Oi, oi! Stop

fooling! Calm down aargh!”

Before Maou could finish, Emi’s toes struck Maou right in the temple.

There was a moan of pain, then the strength fled Maou’s arms and Emi slipped from his embrace.

“Ow!”

Emi landed squarely on her backside, on the concrete base of the stairs. Then her eyebrows furrowed and she reached for her tailbone.

“Ow ow ow ow ow...”

“Ow ow ow your ass! That’s what you get for paying evil unto good!”

Maou had tears leaking from his eyes as he rubbed his temple from where he was beside Emi.

“What do you mean good?! You, you didn’t do anything weird to me when my eyes were closed, did you?!”

Emi hugged herself protectively. Maou rolled his eyes and bellowed.

“When your eyes were closed, nothing happened besides every single one of your personal items aiming for my head like I was a target board!”

“That’s because you’re so bad normally!”

“I live my life more correctly than you!”

“How is that impressive given who you are?! Apologize to the words living your life correctly!”

“Don’t get cocky! You fell from the stairs again! Shouldn’t you be thanking me for my kindness?”

“If I knew this was your kindness, I’d rather have jumped straight off without a bungee cord! Don’t you sleep through the morning?!”

What are you doing here?!”

It would seem the Demon King had work gloves on both hands as he picked up Emi’s personal effects from the ground.

But why was the Demon King doing by cleaning the area around his house?

“I’m free to go where I want! What’s wrong with getting up early for your health in mid-summer?!”

“How is living like a McDonald’s product even healthy?!”

“What are you doing, you two...”

Urushihara chose this moment to show up. He was long used to the Hero and the Demon King feuding like this.

“My apologies. It was all because I suddenly opened the door.”

The girl in the yukata bowed to Emi. It would seem she thought she had hit Emi on the head.

“No, no, it’s not like that. I was careless and my foot slipped.”

Emi hurriedly shook her head.

魔王城見取り図



鈴乃の部屋



202号

押入れ
(天袋無し)

和式

後付け
収納

共用廊下



漆原の
PCデスク

コタツ
(寝るときは寄せる)

主夫の聖域

シンク

冷蔵庫

洗濯機

下足

201号

下駄箱

カラーボックス



恵美の鬼門13階段



“Seriously, you should just slip and fly all the way to the moon next time.”

Maou blew on his cold udon as he said so, a frown on his face.

An unimaginable scene unfolded before Emi in the depths of the Demon King’s Castle.

For one, Ashiya was lying down on a blanket, his face twitching occasionally.

After that, there was a gigantic cardboard box in the kitchen, and the headcloth-wearing girl was wearing an apron while she made food.

Besides the cold udon Emi had overheard them talking about, there were also sliced pickles and basil, as well as cold tofu sprinkled with mustard. All these formed a highly nutritious spread upon their dinner table.

“Yusa, I got back most of the stuff you dropped.”

“Ah, thanks. Just put it over here.”

She had been a bit worried that it was Urushihara recovering her things, but it would be weird to show too much hostility in front of Suzuno, so she decided to obediently thank him and accept her things back.

“The way you speak like my boss is really gross.”

Apparently, he could not hide what he really thought, but since there was no need to explain, she merely shrugged.

“Speaking of which, what is this? Energy drinks in the middle of summer?”

As expected of Urushihara, he produced the bottle of Holy Vitamin β and played with it in mockery.

Emi was more worried than angry at Urushihara’s grade-school stunt, because a bottle of holy magic was not something which could

be shown to anyone in the Demon King's Castle.

“Hey, give it back!”

Emi hurriedly snatched the bottle back from Urushihara's hand and shoved it into the depths of her bag, but cold sweat ran down her back.

The typically insensitive Urushihara looked at Emi and said,

“If you drink that, you'll end up with the same stomach trouble as Ashiya.”

“Eh? You're sick?”

Emi was deeply shocked at this, and looked at the supine Ashiya.

Ashiya clicked his tongue in annoyance and rolled to one side.

“So what? I can feel unwell too.”

Apparently even demons in their human shape due to a lack of demonic magic could get sick too. That was a truly shocking discovery for Emi and Ente Isla.

“I'm a bit curious, what are the symptoms like?”

“A lack of appetite and stomach upsets,” Urushihara explained happily.

“That's pretty normal. How boring,” Emi shrugged in disinterest.

“My gastric problems do not exist for your amusement...”

However, Ashiya's words seemed utterly unimpressive in the face of Emi's disinterest.

Ashiya was the most hostile towards her of the three demons, so she happily decided to take a video of this for use as blackmail material.

“I believe the cause was something I sent.”

Emi looked toward the girl who had spoken.

Her elegant and beautiful features matched her kimono, so much

so that she briefly mistook her for someone from a period drama. Even so, Suzuno radiated an air of awe-inspiring refinement.

Emi could not help but size up her chest.

“About the same... I guess?”

For some reason, she sighed in what seemed like relief.

After all, she was a perfect kimono-clad beauty, but in that aspect, at least, she was the same as Emi.

The girl opposite her had no idea of Emi’s meaningless troubles, and her stiff face might have been an expression of depression or regret.

“I thought that the ideal gift for single men would be something with high nutritional value. Please accept my sincerest apologies for this.”

“Ah, no, it’s not your fault, Kamazuki-san. The udon was delicious.”

Ashiya tried to placate Suzuno from a completely different sitting posture compared to Emi.

“Oi – it should be the menu’s fault, right? You ate cold noodles every day because it was cheap and convenient and now you’re sick.”

Everyone present rolled their eyes at Urushihara, who was saying things like these despite not even earning his own keep.

After that, Suzuno suddenly straightened up, as though she had suddenly thought of something. Then she turned to face Emi neatly.

“This might be a little late, but I am the tenant who has moved into room 202, Kamazuki Suzuno. My birthplace is distant and backward, and I am still getting used to the environs. I would be grateful if you could instruct a bumpkin like myself in the art of city living.”

“Ah, y-yes, pleased to meet you. I’m Yusa Emi.”

Emi quickly cleaned up her posture in response to this unexpected greeting and the fact that Suzuno was touching her fingers to the ground in a senrei bow.

“Still, this might not sound very nice, but perhaps you could have picked a better apartment.”

Emi indicated the dried-out tatami of the Demon King’s Castle.

When she had rented her present apartment, Emi had been cautioned in detail by her agent about the many things single women living in the city had to be wary of.

Emi’s room was on the fifth floor, but until now she had only dared buy male underwear and put them outside with her other laundry. Hers was the only apartment with an automatically locking door.

Indeed, the Villarosa Sasazuka was close to the train station and its rent was low. But it was not a very practical place for a young lady to live by herself.

This venerable building lacked bathing facilities, air conditioning, or a balcony. Its doors used an unreliable round-cylinder lock and most of the houses were empty, with the sole other residents being literal demons from another world.

Given she wore these hard-to-maintain traditional outfits and had even provided food to poor tenants, it was hard to imagine she had been drawn by the cheap rent.

She was probably being too careless in mixing so closely with the bachelors next door in less than a week.

Still, she did not worry about the doubts in Emi’s heart.

“There is little to complain about so long as there is a bed, a roof to keep out the rain, and walls to hold the wind at bay,” Suzuno declared without hesitation.

“In addition, it does not feel overly ostentatious. I also feel that

finding work will be easy since it is near the city.”

Suzuno paused to look at Emi.

“I would like to make my fortune here before returning to my hometown.”

“What a grand ambition. Pay attention, Urushihara,” Ashiya said as he praised Suzuno from his sickbed.

Of course, Urushihara pretended he had not heard, and returned to his place in front of the computer desk.

“In any case, it must be fate that we met in the sprawling domain of Japan. I pray we will get along and I humbly seek your aid.”

Suzuno bowed deeply to Emi once more, which left Emi at something of a loss.

“The, the same to you.”

All she could do was put her hands together and bow.

“Huu~ Well, that was good.”

After finishing his breakfast, Maou stretched as he put his dishes into the sink.

“Ah~ feels like there’s so much more to remember and do. Man, it’s tiring.”

“What, haven’t you been part-timing all this while?”

“Huhu, while you’re passing your days idly, I’ve grown as a human being.”

Who’s the human being here, Emi could not help thinking.

“Surprised, aren’t you? Listen well, Emi! From this Sunday onwards, I shall be the acting store leader for the afternoon shifts of MgRonald’s Hatagaya Station branch!”

After seeing Maou strike a pose with his hands at his hips, backlit by the morning sunlight streaming through the window, Emi felt the strength leave her body.

“Yes, yes, congrats, congrats.”

Maou looked at Emi as she nodded while slow-clapping.

“Ah! You don’t believe me, do you! I’m a shift manager! It’s a position of responsibility!”

“What I don’t believe is that you’re actually bragging about something like that to me. But isn’t that good? That you’ve been working hard?”

Emi dismissively waved off Maou’s increasingly animated antics as he spoke.

“Ah, what an unambitious person you are. Well, forget it. In any case, I’ve been promoted to a height that a serial stair-slipper like yourself can’t even comprehend. Go agonize about it.”

Without another word, Emi tossed a box of tissues at Maou, who was sticking his tongue out at her. Maou dodged it with a calm face, and the box landed on Ashiya’s head, who was behind Maou.

Ashiya thought someone wanted to speak to him, but however much he tried to move to the side, all he managed to do was change his posture.

He looked really ill, but Emi did not care. She looked away because she did not want to look at Maou’s smug face any more.

“...”

“W-what?”

Emi locked eyes with Suzuno, who was staring at her with a dignified expression on her face.

“Emi-dono...”

After saying that, she winked at Emi. When Maou began doing the dishes, she swiftly sidled close and whispered into her ear.

“Are you and Maou-dono engaged in an intimate relationship, Emi-dono?”

“HAAAAAAAAAH?!”

Emi’s bizarre cry was enough to get the attention of the sleeping Ashiya and Urushihara, who had earphones on.

“What, what did you say?!”

“Ah, I mean, after hearing the two of you speak to each other, I can tell that your uninhibited dialogues and your arguments clearly indicate the two of you have a very close relationship.”

“Well, it’s true they talk about everything,” Urushihara said with a cheeky grin on his face from the distance.

“We don’t talk unnecessarily.”

Emi glared at him to shut him up.

Indeed, they were past the need for formality and courtesy, but the fact that this was mistaken for an intimate relationship was quite surprising.

“They might sound uninhibited, but she lacks any human emotions beyond that like honesty, trust, or friendship. Today, she was sincere about knowing if Maou had died in an accident on the way back. I hope you’ll understand that.”

Given the way he had deliberately spoken loud enough to be heard, it was quite clear that Ashiya understood how Emi was glaring at him and how Maou was smiling bitterly.

“Is, is that so...”

In contrast, Suzuno’s expression softened into relief, having hardened earlier from taking away another meaning.

What was so relieving about the fact that Maou and Emi did not have an intimate relationship?

As she thought about that, she suddenly recalled a prior example, which made Emi furrow her brows. She thought about the girl who knew about the battle from two months ago.

“Though it might sound quite surprising.”

This time, it was Emi’s turn to whisper into Suzuno’s ear.

“Are you targeting Maou as well?”

Suzuno’s reaction was quite dramatic.

Her strong-willed face suddenly turned pale, and she suddenly dragged Emi out of the room by the arm.

“Eh? Ah, wait, wait up!”

She dragged Emi into her room and roughly locked the door behind her after checking the interior. Then Suzuno gave Emi a worried look, and in a hushed voice she asked: “What, what do you plan to do after hearing it?”

Emi was confused. What had she said that had made her go pale like that? But if she had pointed out something important, then obviously it would be wise to speak softly, but not in front of the person himself.

Her expression was typically rigid and dignified, so she did not seem like the person to show the inner workings of her heart. However, women were women in the end.

“I’m sorry, but I was not actually thinking that way.”

Emi apologized sincerely to Suzuno in the same quiet tone she had used. Suzuno’s stiff face now gleamed with a layer of cold sweat.

“Even so, it is nothing amazing.”

Suzuno placed her hand over her chest, took a deep breath, and got her breathing under control.

“How did you know?”

“Even if you ask me... There’s no reason. I just had a hunch...”

That was the only answer Emi could give. However, Suzuno seemed to have accepted that careless answer.

“Is that so... That’s amazing...”

Emi had no idea what was so amazing. In any case, Suzuno was looking at Emi's face in awe.

She felt a bit upset about it, but Emi made up her mind. Some things needed to be said.

This girl who had suddenly appeared in the Demon King Castle either did not suspect that they were from another world, or was a newly-spawned demon herself.

However, when she thought about it, if she really was an assassin, it was hardly likely that she would not do anything after being here for a week. In addition, she was far too polite to Emi and the demons.

While she had her weird points, she panicked the same way as any other girl would when the topic of love came up.

“Hey, Suzuno-chan, while you might find this annoying, I hope you'll listen.”

“...What is it?”

And if she was an ordinary girl, then she should try to involve her as little as possible.

“You'd better stay away from him. You'll be sorry.”

“This... why is that?”

Suzuno stared at Emi, a troubled look on her face.

Emi knew from experience that badmouthing Maou too severely had consequences.

“He's not a man that ordinary people can handle. You should stay away from him.”

“...! But, but I'm quite experienced with things like these, despite how I look!”

And so, Suzuno shot back with her own attempt at resistance.

Emi had her doubts about that revelation of her history, but

before she could continue, Emi said: "...However, ah, well, if you say so. Take care. There are things here that only you don't know about."

She had tried to speak in a way which would be easy for her to understand. She had no idea what kind of chord she had struck in Suzuno's heart, but she did not think that she could gain her trust so soon after knowing her for such a short period of time.

"Still, even if you say so, I cannot leave this place any more. While this may be a shameless request, I beseech you to lend me your aid."

This time, Suzuno delivered a deep bow to Emi.

Emi felt that she could not slay the Demon King by herself, but she still felt that she needed to take responsibility for embroiling an innocent girl in the affairs of Ente Isla.

"Mm, if there's anything I can do," she smiled and nodded.

Naturally, besides bringing her closer to Maou.

"I see... then I may rest somewhat at ease."

And so, Suzuno's rigid expression softened somewhat.

It was true that Emi did not think Maou and the others would give Suzuno a hard time, but they were still single men, so one had to be careful.

Given that Emi was the first friend of the same sex she had made in Japan, feeling relaxed around her was only to be expected.

"Ah yes, please wait a little."

Emi gently brushed past Suzuno and returned to the room.

"I trust you didn't do anything weird while I was gone."

She glared at Urushihara while fiddling with her handbag.

"I'm not that anxious to die," Urushihara replied coldly.

Still glaring at him, Emi took out a notebook and pen from inside her bag, tore off a scrap of paper, wrote something on it and handed

it to Suzuno.

“This is my phone number, mailbox address, and home address. If they do anything to you, you can look for my help any time.

“Understood. You have my deepest thanks.”

Suzuno nodded and carefully folded the note back into an inner pocket.

This was the first time Emi had ever seen someone in Japan put something in there.

“What do you take us for?” Maou frowned as he dried the dishes.

“How about bloodthirsty monsters who are lower than cockroaches? Nothing’s happened so far, but if you do anything to Suzuno, I’ll chop off your heads and display them at this window.”

“What kind of evil official are you, anyway?”

Emi glared coldly at Maou’s jibe.

“Then, I should be going. Ah, don’t worry. They look like that, but they’re actually a pretty law-abiding lot.”

Emi put her handbag on her shoulder after saying that last part to Suzuno.

“I’m serious! Men and women have all sorts of different circumstances!”

That warning was addressed to Maou.

“As if I’d need you to tell me that. I won’t repay good with evil like you. Now get lost.”

While Emi mused that there must be something wrong with a Hero who took that at face value, Emi eventually accepted it.

“See you, then.”

With that, she closed the door.

As Suzuno looked at the door—

“Noooooooooooooooo!!!!”

Emi’s scream came shortly after, and Suzuno reflexively ran out to the hallway in her socks. She saw Emi sweating heavily at the middle of the steps, hanging onto the railings on both sides for dear life.

“It, it’s fine. This time it’s okay. Really.”

Emi smiled coldly and slowly descended the remaining half of the staircase, then nervously went back.

“Did she pass the K point?” Maou’s voice asked from inside the house.

“Nope, she managed to hang on halfway,” came the reply. Then: “...Looks like she’s running from the apartment really fast.”

For some reason, Urushihara was mumbling to himself as he looked at the computer display.

“Tomorrow afternoon is in your hands, Maa-kun. Don’t fall behind Sentucky Fried Chicken’s new outlet!”

Kisaki gave Maou more pressure on the Friday evening when Emi had invited herself to the Demon King’s Castle.

The week starting from tomorrow onwards would see Maou as the afternoon shift manager; in other words, an acting store leader. When he came to work at lunch, he received a nametag from Kisaki that had “Maou” written on it in kanji, marking him as the person-in-charge.

His previous name tag made him look like part-timer, but he felt quite smug now that it was written in kanji.

Thanks to Kisaki’s guidance, he largely understood the practical operation of the business and the basics of store management, though he still needed to mentally prepare himself.

“In case of emergency, you can contact me as usual. However, you

may use your own judgement aside from that. That's to help your growth too."

"I understand."

"Mm, that's a good answer. Work hard so you don't end up in Trinidad and Tobago."

"...You're not kidding, are you?"

Maou's face was twitching.

"I don't make unfunny jokes."

Kisaki's words were not funny at all.

"There'll be very few people tonight, but don't relax. Your time as a shift manager starts now."

"Eh?"

Maou looked at the day's roster. There were only two lines which ran until closing hours at 2400, representing Maou and Kisaki.

There was also another line, from 1700 to 2200...

"Chi-chan, huh," Maou muttered.

Kisaki's keen ears picked it up as she was studying the roster and said: "What, still arguing with Chi-chan?"

"No, it's not that..."

Maou's voice trailed off near the end.

Chi-chan, or Sasaki Chiho, was a crew member that Maou had been raising ever since she started working with McGonald's. She was a rare highschooler who possessed outstanding talent and customer service attitude.

She was also the only one in Japan who knew that Maou and Emi were the Demon King and Hero from another world, respectively.

Neither of them had any special reason to seal her mouth or alter her memories.

Chiho was not the sort to spread rumors like “that guy is a Demon King!” Even if she did, nobody would believe her, and nothing good would come of others knowing it.

More important than that was the fact that Chiho had been keeping a strange distance from Maou, ever since that battle where she had learned their true identities.

She was not afraid of working with the Demon King, so there ought to be another reason, but it had begun to weigh on Maou’s mind.

Kisaki narrowed her eyes as she saw Maou’s reaction.

“If this affects the daily sales, it won’t just be Trinidad and Tobago for you.”

The air around Kisaki briefly transformed into a raging Arctic blizzard.

“I think you’ll probably end up in Greenland instead.”

“Nonono, isn’t that the Arctic Circle? Can people even live in Greenland?”

“Apologize to the people of Greenland right now! Greenland is MgRonald’s territory. It has its own government and over 100,000 inhabitants! In recent years, the faction seeking independence from Denmark has been...”

“I’m not asking for trivia like that! I can’t go there! More than that, the reason is because—”

“If I have a capable but naive blockhead who can’t respond to a highschooler’s affections, I can just laugh it off. But if this ends up affecting the receipts, it’s not a laughing matter any more.”

She pitched a straight ball at him. Maou felt faint, and he felt his butt bump against the inside of the counter.

While Maou had not realized it himself, Chiho had begun feeling for Maou after working with him. Those feelings had not changed

even after learning that Maou was the Demon King.

“Haah. Maybe I shouldn’t hire young girls any more,” Kisaki said, clueless to his troubles.

Time passed, and it was almost 1700 hours. Unable to calm himself down, Maou gave the automatic door a warm welcome.

“Ah, hello...”

The aforementioned Sasaki Chiho had come to work in her high school’s summer uniform. She greeted Maou in a very unnatural manner as he stepped out from behind the counter.

“Ah, er, h-hi.”

They exchanged the minimum basic pleasantries, but the fact was that they had been speaking very little to each other during their workdays. Maou had no idea where to start repairing their relationship.

“Ah – hello, Chi-chan.”

A voice came from the side.

“Ah! hello, Kisaki-san!”

The look Kisaki had on her face while looking at Maou changed, and she looked at Chiho with interest.

“Hurry up and change. Maa-kun will be taking on heavy responsibility from tomorrow onwards, so he’ll have a lot to say to you, Chi-chan.”

“Ah, yes... sorry.”

Chiho nodded and went past Maou, heading for the employee break room behind the counter.

Their eyes did not meet, and she walked past him right away.

“Hmm, it looks pretty serious,” Kisaki giggled as she watched Chiho leave.

“This is one of the reasons why I’m a little worried about leaving

the store to you.”

“Well, you say you’re worried... while things between me and Chiho are a little awkward, we don’t argue and it won’t affect our work,” Maou said as he looked at the employee break room with a distressed expression on his face.

“Even if you’re fine, Chiho isn’t, is she?”

Maou looked at Kisaki in surprise as she pointed it out.

“The cogs that turn in industry are humans first and foremost. If you only fixate on one aspect of things, you will never be able to grasp the secret of interpersonal relations and it won’t create a good work environment.”

“Is that so... ah, so it is.”

Maou lowered his head after realising his inadequacy. After that, Kisaki used a careful pause to defuse the mood in the air.

“It’s fine. Chiho lacks life experience, so it’s been bothering her for a long time. Once an opportunity appears, she’ll bounce back.”

In a way, Maou had several hundred more years’ life experience compared to Chiho or even Kisaki, but unfortunately none of that experience was applicable to this problem.

While the problem had not been solved, Maou’s heart felt lighter after Kisaki’s lecture. He looked up to Kisaki’s eyes, which seemed to be able to see through anything.

“You’re really amazing, Kisaki-san.”

“Anyone who’s lived long enough will eventually learn the ways of the world.”

Maou was still confused, but it was about time to perform a store check before dinnertime. However, Kisaki stopped him.

“Let Chi-chan do it. I’d like to reassess her work attitude now that we have some free time.”

“Ah, yes...”

Kisaki snatched the checklist from Maou’s hands.

“Maa-kun, take a rest. You can go eat if you come back before 1800. Or would you rather eat the store food?”

Maou shook his head at Kisaki’s suggestion.

“No, I’ll rest in the break room. I brought my own bento today.”

“Bento, huh. Well, it’s good that you can cook for yourself. Since it’s very hot, pay attention to the food storage. All the food items are very important. Don’t forget to put umeboshi into cool and dark places.”

This was the most basic measure to ward off food poisoning. Maou nodded.

“Those are fine. It’d be bad if we couldn’t work. Then, I’ll go take a rest.”

Maou swapped out his duty status to “Break” and then entered the employee break room.

He just happened to run into Chiho, who had emerged from the ladies’ changing room in the depths of the break room.

“Ah...”

After Chiho realized it was Maou, she took a breath and avoided his eyes.

“Ah... er, I’m on break for a bit. Kisaki-san said she wanted to reassess your work performance again during this lull period.”

“I-I got it...”

She nodded hurriedly, as though she were clutching something to her chest, and tried to slip by from Maou’s side.

“?”

She halted in place as she saw Maou open his sling bag and take out a box, wrapped in the kind of floral-print handkerchief one

would find in a 100 yen store.

“Maou-san, that’s...”

Chiho had actually taken the initiative to speak to him, a rarity in these two months.

Maou undid the wrapping handkerchief and took out a double-layered bento box. The box seemed too small in the hands of a man like Maou and it was covered in flowery designs.

Maou looked up and raised the object he was holding as he answered.

“This? It’s a bento box.”

“Bento...? That’s a cute bento box. Did Ashiya-san buy it because it was cheap, or was there some other reason?”

Chiho knew Maou’s true identity, so naturally she had seen Ashiya as well. She also knew that Ashiya was actually a demon, but now worked to support Maou’s lifestyle.

This was an innocent question by Chiho, but now that two months had passed since the last time he had managed to chat normally with her, Maou replied honestly without thinking: “No, I borrowed it. Actually, someone moved in next door just a while ago.”

“By next door you mean... the apartment?”

Chiho knew the situation of Maou’s apartment, and she was shocked speechless. However, what she heard after that made her freeze up.

“Mm, it’s a young girl...”

“A-A GIRL?!”

“Uwah! D-don’t scream like that!”

Chiho paid no heed to the fact that Maou had jumped up at her cry.

“W-when you say a g-g-girl, you mean, you borrowed a bento box

from them, what does that...”

“Chi-chan, stop shaking! Please stop shaking me!”



When Chiho came to her senses, she realised she had seized Maou by the lapels and was violently shaking him.

“And and and and that, that n-n-neighboring girl g-g-gave you a...!”

“Y-y-y-yes, b-but, please stop, shaking me...”

The Demon King had lost to a high school girl in physical strength.

“I didn’t, I didn’t expect, I didn’t expect it at all! W-w-w-was it h-h-h-hand made?!”

The distance of the past two months seemed like an illusion as Chiho desperately tried to pull the front of Maou’s shirt into her face as she stared blankly at him.

The girl who had moved in was called Kamazuki Suzuno, of course. Now that Ashiya’s physical condition was in a shambles, there was nobody else who could make food for Maou other than her.

It was plainly obvious from the udon on the first day and today’s fresh ginger that Suzuno had gone out on her own to gather all sorts of ingredients to the Demon King’s Castle, where she made all manner of dishes.

Maou and gang had no reason to complain. This eased the tension of having new neighbors and helped with the family finances, but at the same time they did not think about how this might be laying a landmine for the future.

“Er, erm, I, I guess, should be handmade, I think.”

Now that Chiho was starting to drag out her words, she was not in a state to be toyed with.

“Can can can can can can–”

“Can?”

“Can, can I take, take a look?!”

“Okay! Okay! Stop shaking me! Please!”

After finally releasing Maou, Chiho nervous stared at the contents of the bento box which Maou had opened.

The upper level was neatly packed with colorful vegetables with no space in between. Chiho froze as she saw the luxurious contents, and she stared in surprise as she realized something.

She stared at the the fried shredded burdock root, chikushi, flower-sliced turnips, radishes and carrots, stirred with shredded carrots, chestnuts, and beans.

“New Year’s cooking...?”

“New Year’s cooking? Say what?” Maou nervously asked, but Chiho shook her head.

“Please let me see the bottom layer!”

There, Chiho saw something she had expected, but did not want to see.

She saw rice sprinkled with seaweed and dried plums, formed into a heart shape.

Even at night, the Tokyo heat wave showed no signs of abating.

“-elcome!”

Emi entered the convenience store which was nearest to her home, Friend Market Eifukucho, Nanohana-doori Branch. As she did, the student worker greeted her with a far worse service attitude than Maou had.

There were no other customers in here besides Emi.

Emi sighed as the cool air washed over her, and then headed over to the corner where they sold bento.

“I ended up buying the same as usual without realizing it.”

With that, she picked up a package of curry with a very long name: “Healthy Summer Vegetable Curry! Only 500 kcal!” However,

that alone would be a little sad, so she picked up some cabbage salad, instant stew, and chocolate eclairs for dessert, then piled them on top of the curry.

Emi headed for the counter, musing about the low-calorie curry as she did.

Operators had fixed hours, but she had to alight in Hatagaya as part of her job as the Hero, so it was late by the time she got home.

Today featured the greatest changes of the four days of surveillance, and she also had to observe his workplace. She alighted at Hatagaya after taking the Keio New Line and observed the McGonalds from the bookstore opposite, with a magazine in hand.

However, Emi had to conclude that she was a stalker, given her nonstop surveillance of Maou, his female superior, and the only Japanese person who knew both their identities (Sasaki Chiho).

“-ould -ou -ike -o-arm -is -p -ere?”

She paid her bill to the clerk, who kept omitting the first syllable from every word he said.

Maou was enjoying a rich and varied menu thanks to his neighbor, but she had to waste her time and energy on him. It made it hard for her to get excited about the convenience store food.

“-anks -or -opping -ere. -ease -ome -gain.”

Emi took the package of heated curry and prepared to leave the store.

Just then—

“!!”

Emi jerked her head up as she sensed a palpable surge of murderous intent.

It might have been in the middle of summer, she might have been on her way home from work, and she might have been used to the

coolness of the air conditioner, but her honed reflexes had not grown dull.

In addition, it was a matter of life or death.

Therefore, when a dark shadow appeared, taking aim at Emi while broadcasting their murderous intentions, Emi was already prepared for it when it closed in with a speed impossible for any Japanese person.

However, because it was so fast, it did not notice the slowly-opening glass door between Emi and itself, and it bounced off, falling to the ground. However, it recovered itself immediately.

“! -at -as -at -ust -ow?!”

The shocked clerk – who seemed to have been born speaking this way – looked in Emi’s direction.

On the other side of the cracked glass sliding doors was what could only be described by eyewitnesses as “A bank robber who had escaped from a hairdresser’s salon.” It wore a black vinyl poncho, its eyes were black, it wore a hat, camouflage pants, and it was a small person sprawled on the ground.

Since it had collapsed on the external sensor, the automatic door remained open and the cold air within the shop immediately escaped.

Regardless of how it tried to move, Emi put her restrictive handbag on the ground and put her shopping bag on the counter when—

“Customer, are you alright?”

Perhaps he sensed that a newly-arrived customer had met with an accident but the clerk hurriedly jumped over the counter and ran to the entrance, but he stopped in his tracks as he saw the unusual getup of the fallen person.

“Look out!”

Emi rammed the stunned clerk aside. He had not expected to be attacked, and the clerk hit a rack of job-recruitment magazines, which ended up saving his life.

A ray of light scythed through the place where the clerk had been standing. It scraped Emi's shoulder – she had knocked him aside – tore the sleeve of her dress and even bisected the shopping bag of bento she had placed on the counter.

Emi's judgement was swift. Once she ascertained that the clerk had not stood up—

“Celestial Wind Blade!”

—Emi unleashed the Evolving Holy Sword: One Wing on the weird-looking masked bandit who had shredded her sleeve and her dinner.

The holy sword in her right hand sent a powerful shockwave at the bandit, blasting him out of the shop.

“Don't come out! Also, call the cops!”

While she did not know if he had heard, Emi sprinted out after the attacker before the clerk saw her holy sword.

However, another razor-edged beam of light shot out at Emi as she ran from the store.

There was a metallic sound of collision as Emi deflected it with a swing of her holy sword. Seeking to overtake her prepared foe, Emi leapt.

“Celestial Greaves!”

Focusing her exorcising raiment on her legs, Emi leapt to the roof of the building opposite the convenience store.

The bandit was wearing a hat which only exposed its eyes, and it snapped its head back to look at Emi and her superhuman athletic prowess.

Emi had used her holy sword and exorcising raiment without

hesitation because she had sensed that her foe was not human.

Her enemy carried a massive scythe.

It looked like it could hew through three bodies at once. Its wielder was short, wearing a hat that only exposed its eyes, and the overall effect was to look like Death from the tarot deck.

The failed robber had not been carrying that thing when they had bounced off the automatic door.

It was not something ordinary robbers would carry, nor had it been stashed on their person or elsewhere.

When one considered the fact that this robber could produce a weapon made of a metal that could clash with Emi's holy sword out of nowhere, it was clear that this failed robber was not an Earthling.

"I don't know if you're human or demon, but what are you trying to do by attacking me in such an obvious way?!" Emi shouted at her attacker

"It's one thing if it was just me, but I won't forgive you for involving the Japanese people!"

Emi raised her holy sword and jumped down from the roof.

"Yeeart!"

This was not a simple falling strike using momentum. It utilized the exorcising raiment on her feet to produce a charge of maximum power.

But the attack instead braced its scythe, sweeping with its haft at Emi's attack from above.

Emi had anticipated this move, and when the blade was blocked, she flipped over it in a reverse roundhouse kick.

Her foot, sheathed in her exorcising raiment, struck her opponent squarely in the left shoulder.

The scythe-user was unbalanced from that bludgeoning attack,

and he revealed an opening.

There was a hole, but Emi could not just charge in like that. Emi reversed her holy sword, leading with the pommel and aiming for her foe's chest in an attempt to knock her opponent out.

However, in that moment, the scythe-user's eyes emitted a flash of light from within its hat.

From them sprang what looked like violet-colored lasers. This scene would have looked like some sort of joke to an outsider, but it made Emi run cold, and she tried to sweep the beams aside with her holy sword.

For some reason, her instincts told her that she must not let them touch her body.

However, the outcome took Emi by surprise.

“Eh?”

Her holy sword lost its shine.

The Evolving Holy Sword: Single Wing, which changed its shape depending on Emi's holy magic, flickered like a lightbulb that had lost power before shrinking to the size of a dagger.

While Emi tried to reinfuse it with holy magic to restore it to its “first stage” size, the scythe-wielder did not miss this chance and continuously fired more beams of purple light at her.

“What, what is this?!”

The speed of those attacks was nothing to write home about, but they had the unprecedented ability to shrink her holy sword. She had no idea what would happen if they directly touched her body, but without the ability to fight back with her sword, the tables had instantly turned.

Emi began to panic at her enemy's unexpected moves and power. There was no way this could be anything but an assassin from Ente Isla. The surprise was in how the battle against the perverted

scythe-wielding robber who shot beams from its eyes ended.

“!”

Suddenly, the scythe-user groaned and stopped firing its purple beams.

Emi watched her foe in surprise as her foe’s face-concealing hat turned a fluorescent orange, down to its eyes.

“Hey!”

Just then, Emi saw a round, orange-colored object fly through the air, accompanied by a man’s cry.

That object impacted the scythe-user’s shoulder, staining a huge chunk of his upper body in bright colors.

Emi looked back to the convenience store in surprise.

The clerk from just now seemed to have run out, throwing anti-burglar paintballs at the scythe-wielder.

While he had deftly countered the strike of Emi’s holy sword, the scythe-wielder rubbed its face like it was about to faint. Perhaps the paint of the paintballs had gotten into his eyes.

“Wait...”

However, Emi began to fear for the clerk’s humble valor. It was all well and good to be dutiful to one’s job, but the paintballs were meant to chase fleeing criminals. They had no ability to repel enemies besides their added stench.

If things went poorly, the scythe-wielder might try and take revenge. The thought filled Emi with fear for a moment. However—

“Eh?”

After looking back at the scythe-wielder, Emi saw them blundering away like the failed robber that they were.

“...Eh...”

Emi hmphed despite herself.

“Hey you! Get back here!”

The clerk was the only one who was not surprised by this. He gave chase after the fleeing man, using his paintballs.

However, all they could hear was the sound of the paintballs bursting. Whether it was effective remained to be seen.

Emi hurriedly resheathed her holy sword within herself, but she still grumbled in her heart.

Why had this assassin from Ente Isla, whose target was Emi, who used a massive weapon and who had crashed into the automatic door – run from a convenience store clerk throwing paintballs?

However, there was no better outcome than avoiding a needless battle and sacrifice. At the same time, she had to be more serious about certain things.

“Ah – ustomer-sama, are you alright?”

The clerk looked around in excitement, and finally spotted Emi. She had dispelled her holy sword and exorcising raiment when the scythe-wielder had fled, but he might ask her about them if he were calmer.

“I should be asking that, are you alright? Sorry for bumping into you.”

“It’s fine, my forehead is just...”

It would seem he had hit the rack of recruitment magazines head first, leaving a red print on his forehead. Of course, if he had given chase after that perverted robber, he might have been scythed in half.

“Have you called the police yet?”

“Ah, it’s okay, the burglar alarm should have notified the police and the security firm!”

After that, he put his hands together and looked at Emi, as though he had suddenly thought of something.

“Ah, customer-sama, I do apologize for this, but we have a protocol for times like these. Could I ask you to stay here until the police come?”

Emi snorted. In any event, while she had expected herself to be a witness to this attempted robbing, she had not expected events to develop like this.

Could the police finish their crime scene investigation so quickly?

“...Ah – alright, I get it.”

While she briefly thought about going back to her apartment to get her cell phone and ID, she immediately rejected the idea. It would be unwise to expose the fact that this convenience store was the closest one to her home.

It was not that she did not trust the clerk’s question. It was also a form of self-defense for solo life in Tokyo.

Emi returned dejectedly to the store, where she found her shopping bag that had been cut in half. The curry, salad, and chocolate puffs were all smushed together into a dark-colored, pizza-like state.

She picked up the sole intact item and turned to the clerk.

“Please give me a kettle. I’m a bit hungry, so I’ll have this stew here.”

After Emi poured the hot water into the cup of instant stew, the clerk noticed Emi’s difficulty and led her to the office and gave her a chair.

As she looked around the interior of the office – which she had never been in before – Emi muttered: “That’s pretty good stuff.”

While the evolution state of the Evolving Holy Sword: Single Wing she had used this time round was still in its “First Stage” form, it was more powerful than how it had been during the battle with Lucifer. Not only was it developing towards its “Second Stage” form,

she had even managed to use it to deploy her exorcising raiment.

Even so, she had no idea what those violet beams were. She had never seen an enemy which could nullify her holy sword and her holy magic.

Emi blew on the one-minute stew while gnashing her teeth in anger.

The damn perverted robber had made her already unsightly dinner even worse.

If I meet him again, I'll cut him in half before he can use his weird power, see if I don't, Emi vowed.

“Ah, -ustomer-sama, I-I believe this is yours, -ustomer-sama.”

Saying so, the clerk brought her handbag in to her, the one she had set down on the ground.

“Ah, sorry, thank you.”

Speaking of which, she had put it down inside the store itself. Saying so, the clerk pointed at the handbag.

“There seems to be something ringing inside... an incoming call...” he said, with a serious look on his face.

“Eh? Ah, eh?”

Emi's face turned red and she pulled out her cell phone.

Perhaps she had forgotten to set it to silent mode, but the theme to her favorite period drama, “Raging Shogun” was playing at its maximum volume.

“Ah,ahaha, I like that show. What an accident.”

As she made an unnecessary excuse, Emi turned away and answered the phone.

『Yusa-san! Something bad happened to Maou-san!』

Emi snatched the phone away from her ear because the caller was screaming at the top of their voice.

『Yusa-san! Yusa-san?!』

In her surprised, Emi had almost spilled her stew. The display read “Sasaki Chiho” and showed her number. As a worried expression crossed Emi’s face over Chiho’s sudden call, she nervously brought the phone close to her ear again.

“Chi-Chiho? What’s wrong?”

“It’s Maou-san! Maou-san!”

“What happened? Is he dead?”

Emi was in a bad mood and did not want to think of Maou, hence her ghastly question.

Emi knew Chiho had feelings for Maou.

After that battle two months ago, she had exchanged contact information with Chiho to keep her safe and to make things easier to keep an eye on Maou while he worked. She typically talked to Chiho over the phone and did not speak to her in person.

Emi had just seen Maou and Chiho working normally in the MgRonalds. She had no idea what would panic her so much.

『He brought bento! *Handmade!!!*』

She seemed to be crying as she said it.

Emi had no idea what Chiho was crying about. She slurped a mouthful of soup in confusion.

“Bento? But Ashiya is mad about the stuff. Well, it’s true that the in-store food will go to waste. Still, bringing bento shouldn’t be that surprising...”

『Ashiya-san didn’t make that! And it was a handmade two-layer heart-shaped bento!』

“Please calm down a little and explain in Japanese.”

Emi smiled bitterly as she said so. She finally knew what was rattling Chiho.

Maou, thoughtless as always, had once more done something stupid which had inflamed the tender emotions of a young girl.

“That? You mean it was made by the girl who moved in next–”

『Yusa-san, you know about this? Do you think this is really alright, Yusa-san?!』

“Ehhh? What?”

What was this all about? She did not want to know whose food Maou was eating. On the contrary, she wanted to know what was on her menu for tonight.

“Does it matter? Well, I suppose the improved food supply at the Demon King’s Castle might lead to global disaster, but it’s not like we can do anything about it right now.”

Kamazuki Suzuno seemed to be an innocent girl. However, Japan was a big place, and while one could hardly imagine someone like that in a place like Tokyo, it might be perfectly reasonable for an heiress from a rural village to live and behave in such a way.

If Suzuno were dangerous, she would surely have started something during the days in which Emi had not known of her existence.

Emi slurped another spoonful of soup as she pondered the matter.

『Are you even a Hero, Yusa-san?!』

Emi had to pull the phone away from her ear since Chiho was shouting angrily at her.

『What’ll you do if that neighbor’s an assassin who’s trying to murder Maou-san?!』

“...”

Emi had not expected to hear that from Chiho, and she was momentarily at a loss for words.

『How is that strange?! Why would a girl who just moved in get so

close to three men in a run-down apartment when they have no money and Maou-san doesn't even look that good?! Maou-san said it was just a present, but do you think girls exist who would really do all that for a neighbor they've known for just a few days?!』

“...It's not me saying this, but Chiho, do you really like him?”

Emi could not stop herself from verifying that with Chiho, but Chiho casually said something that was beyond the pale: 『Like I said, I'm the only one who'd do all that for him!』

So she considered herself the sole exception to that rule because she was blinded by her youth, then?

Even if she said that, the fact was that Emi had seen Suzuno labor tirelessly to tend the Demon King's Castle, and she had heard her trying to build goodwill with the Demon King.

From that point of view, Chiho had even more things to be afraid of.

Still, as Emi recalled their conversation in the Demon King's Castle, she realised something.

Emi had already given her contact information to Suzuno.

While she thought that Suzuno would be uneasy without friends of the same sex, there had been bizarre changes in the Demon King's Castle, and Emi had been attacked by that perverted scythe-wielder on the exact same day that she had given her contact information to someone she had met for the first time.

Was there a link here?

However, it was hard to imagine Suzuno, well-mannered and dressed in her immaculate kimono, could be that failed robber. The only thing they had in common was their small size.

Emi tried to correct her thinking. Was it really a coincidence that such anomalies had happened to the Demon King and the Hero at the same time?

Lucifer and Olba's attack from two months ago swept through her mind.

『Yusa-san? Yusa-san?』

Chiho's shouting woke Emi from her contemplation.

“Ah, sorry, I was just thinking...”

『Please help me out, Yusa-san. You're the Hero, right? So you have to be the one to defeat Maou-san!』

She took a deep breath, as though she were being overwhelmed by Chiho's sheer presence.

“Ahhh, well, you say that...”

『Therefore, please help me...』

How had the plan to defeat Maou ended up turning into helping Chiho? Emi had no idea. All she could do was let Chiho continue explaining.

CHAPTER 2

THE HERO GETS INTO DEBT BECAUSE OF A SERIES OF MISTAKES

勇者、勘違いの連鎖の果てに借りを作る



The news that Olba Meyer had gone missing in another world rocked the members of the Six Archbishops, who were gathered at the Shrine of the Archbishops.

Olba Meyer was one of the Six Archbishops, and one of the Hero's companions in her quest to slay the Demon King.

However, everything changed when they received the news which came from the tribunal which had been organized to find him. Said tribunal was based in St. Ignorets, the headquarters of the Holy Church.

“Emilia the Hero is still alive in another world?!”

Robertio Igno Valentia, the oldest member of the Six Archbishops which ruled the Holy Church, straightened up in shock when he heard that news. They were gathered there to discuss the expulsion of Olba Meyer – who had been defeated – from their number.

“According to Olba, is it not true that Emilia Justina and the Evolving Holy Sword: Single Wing disappeared after a fierce battle with the Demon King Satan?”

“That would seem to be a complete lie.”

The female reporting this spoke with such certainty that it rendered the oldest of the five Archbishops speechless.

“We’ve cast multiple Sonar pulses on the other world and analyzed their returns. The recent house arrests of Emerada Etuva and Alberto Ende were also instigated by Olba-sama.”

“What, what, what...!”

After this series of unbelievable reports, Robertio – who had health issues recently – went red in the face.

“As for Emerada Etuva, we have proof that she has returned to the St. Aire Empire. She has testified that Emilia is still alive, and has submitted a report revealing Olba's apostasy.”

“A-a-apostasy... an Archbishop, an apostate!”

“Robertio-sama! Please hang in there!”

The Church’s Agricultural Minister Servantes Rebiriz massaged Robertio’s back,

“What a shocking report...”

The reporter chided:

“Be that as it may, it is all true.”

She did not care at all.

“But, but deciding that Olba lied... it might be possible that he knew Emilia was still alive and went to rescue her...”

“That’s not possible. Why did he not tell others that the supposedly dead Hero was still alive? Why did he go to take care of it by himself?”

The female giving the report sighed, and told the Archbishops the cruel truth.

“We cannot ignore the effect of Emerada Etuva, Court Sorceress of the St. Aire’s Empire, vouching for Emilia’s survival. This is at odds with the Church’s official stance that Emilia is dead. What should we do?”

“What... do you mean...”

Robertio looked somewhat indignant after running short on breath.

The female reporter stoically continued her report to the aged archbishop:

“That is to say, will we acknowledge that Olba-sama was in error, or will we stand by the Church’s decision to the end?”

The Shrine of the Archbishops was briefly silent.

“Specifically, are we going to recognize an Archbishop’s apostasy, or eliminate Emerada Etuva, Alberto Ende, and Emilia? These are our two choices.”

“What a ridiculous... Emilia and Alberto aside, we even have to deal with St. Aire’s Court Sorceress...”

Servantes seemed to have trouble getting the words out, but the stern expression on the reporter’s face did not change as she said: “When the Demon Army still ran rampant, did we not do such things all the time to maintain unity in the Holy Church on the Western Continent? More to the point, I am referring to the group I lead, formerly known as the Inquisition.”

The atmosphere in the shrine grew heavy thanks to those words.

“The Church will pay dearly no matter which path it chooses. However, if you simply shirk the problem, the Church’s very reputation will be at stake. That is all the Church amounts to; people who discarded the Hero, slayer of the Demon King and the hope of mankind, after she was used up.”

The female reporter looked disdainfully at everyone else in the shrine. They seemed to have been shaken by this. Servantes replied in grave tones.

“You are a member of the Inqu... no, the Doctrinal Correction Council. How would you handle this situation?”

The woman’s answer was simple and clear.

“Servantes-sama, it is not as though you do not know what it means to rename the Inquisition to the Tribunal.”

Servantes tried to flee the woman’s eyes.

“Before this, there was the threat of the Demon King to justify our actions, but everyone now knows that this threat does not exist. It would be a mistake to think we can do as we please in the name of God.”

“What, what are you saying?!”

Robertio had picked up on the woman’s phrasing.

“So you’re saying that it would be better to do it after the current

shock?”

The woman drew herself up and looked each of the five Archbishops in the eye.

“The Demon King Satan is also alive in the other world.”

Robertio collapsed, frothing at the mouth.

“...I’m just not confident at all...”

On the next day – which was to say, Friday – Emi and Chiho stood at the door to the Demon King’s Castle. It was morning, and the weather of early summer would soon show its true power.

“But, but...”

Chiho nervously looked at the door of the Demon King’s Castle from behind Emi’s back. She had a large bag in hand. It was easy for even Emi to imagine its contents.

“But if I lose here, I won’t be able to stand up by myself...”

Who are you afraid of losing to?

However, saying that out loud would be ridiculous.

“But, but, it was a really elaborate bento, even though it wasn’t seasonal or anything! And look, wouldn’t Maou-san be in danger if it was poisoned...?”

“If this were an assassin from Ente Isla, they would have poisoned him long ago.”

Emi was sure of that.

In any case, that would just add to Chiho’s worries. She had enough to worry about already.

Don’t use us as an excuse, face it head-on like the real Chiho-chan would.

“O-okay!”

Emi dragged out Chiho from her hiding place behind herself, and then patted her on the shoulders to cheer her up.

And so, Chiho looked back at Emi, a nervous look on her face.

“A-ah, Yusa-san, sorry, and thank you.”

These words were coming from Chiho, who knew everything about “Emi” and “Maou”.

Regardless of how much it involved interfering with Ente Isla’s affairs, Emi should never have approved of Chiho getting closer to Maou.

Now that she could use holy magic, there was nothing to stand in the way of Emi slaying the Demon King.

All she had to do was wipe the memories of the few people who knew about Maou, kill the rest of the Demon King’s people, and return to Ente Isla with Emerada’s help.

However, a smile with complex undertones appeared on Emi’s face as she replied: “That’s fine. I don’t care about those guys, but I want to be your friend, Chiho-chan.”

That came from Emi’s heart.

Had Chiho received the feelings she had wrapped up in her words? Chiho calmed her breathing to work up courage, and then pressed the doorbell of the Demon King’s Castle.

There was an immediate response.

“Yes, I’ll be there right away!”

“!”

There was a sharp intake of breath from Chiho as she heard an unknown girl’s voice. Emi could tell that the determination she had fought so hard to regain was starting to falter.

As expected, the person who answered the door was not the master of the house Maou, or the househusband Ashiya, or even the

hikkikomori NEET Urushihara, but Suzuno, who was dressed in a light blue yukata printed with morning glories under an apron.

She gleamed with the morning's light, even with a headcloth on, and her skin was not marred by a drop of sweat despite the heat and her kimono. Given how she was drying her hands with a towel, it was clear that she had been washing something.

While she looked youthful at a glance, her elegant and reserved expression radiated an air of maturity which Chiho lacked.

“Oya? This is Emi-dono and... may I know who you are?”

“I, I, I’m...”

In contrast to the calm greeting, Chiho sounded like her voice box had frozen over.

“Sadao-dono, you have guests.”

Chiho was stunned by the words which had come from this mysterious girl in the beautiful kimono.

She did not know anyone among Maou's circle of friends who addressed him by his first name.

She herself had only addressed Maou as her senpai and as her elder.

Yet this woman had suddenly appeared and was referring to him with such intimacy.

A dizzying sense of despair overcame Chiho, and she had trouble standing.

Emi watched Chiho from behind, but she could not go to her aid. This was Chiho's war to fight, and only Chiho could turn things around.

“Ah? Is it Emi again?”

“No, it is not just Emi-dono.”

“Eh?”

The speaker was the object of Chiho's affection, Maou Sadao.

"Ehh? Chi-chan?! What's she doing here so early in the morning?" he asked in surprise when he realised Chiho was present.

"Ma-Maou-san..."

Chiho's eyes went dewy before the battle began.

Seeing this, Emi could not help but palm her face.

This is bad. Maou lost control of the situation.

"Er, ah, I, I, ah, if it's okay, ah, cook..."

She was trying to form sentences with the voice of a buzzing mosquito, but the shock she had suffered left her unable to speak coherently.

"Ah, what happened, Chi-chan?"

In the end, Maou noticed Chiho's strange state, but Chiho – who had been on the verge of tears since just now – was at her wits' end.

Salvation came in the form of a voice from the Demon King's Castle.

"Sa-Sasaki-san came, did she...?"

Ashiya's voice sounded weak, yet it managed to carry over just fine.

"Kamazuki-san, my apologies, but the black tea for guests is in the cabinet under the kettle..."

"Ashiya-san?"

Chiho noticed that Ashiya was lying on a blanket opposite Maou and the mysterious woman.

"Eh? Ashiya-san... are you unwell?"

"I'm not sick, it's more like..."

Maou scratched his head and looked between Chiho and Ashiya.

"Well, that's it. That's what behind yesterday's bento."

“Eh?”

Chiho tilted her head, the beginnings of tears in her eyes and a confused look on her face.

“Uwah~ the basil’s been sliced so finely, it’s beautiful...”

“Sharpen the knife and cut the basil in half. Then gather them up into a pile and slice it again. It’s simple that way.”

“The crunchy feeling of eating fresh vegetables is...”

“Soak them in water and then shake them dry. If you just cut out the heart and then slice them without further preparation, invisible particles will get stuck inside. Therefore it’s better to soak them than just rinse them.”

“Why not use soy sauce on the cold tofu?”

“Because using water instead dilutes the salt content of the soup, and makes for a gentler taste.”

This was what passed between Suzuno and Chiho.

Emi, who was feeling listless for some reason, did not pay attention to what they said.

Now that Chiho understood that Suzuno had come to help from next door because Ashiya had fallen ill and Maou was having trouble because he could not do the housework, and that Suzuno had a habit of addressing people by their first names, Chiho’s eyes had finally returned to normal.

After directing a look of utter contempt at Urushihara – who was still napping after letting his neighbor do work for him – Chiho introduced herself once more to Suzuno.

“The dining table is well-stocked thanks to your generous contribution of provisions, Chiho-dono.”

The table had already been set, but with the addition of Chiho’s

fried chicken and bean salad, it seemed a bit much just for breakfast.

“Ah – thanks, Chi-chan. It was a surprise at first, but this is a rare occasion. Then, I’ll dig in,” Maou said as he wagged his hands, not sure which dish to eat first.

“O-Okay.”

“Kamazuki-san, my deepest apologies.”

Ashiya stood up, his face looking very frail, and bowed his head.

“There’s so many people, are there enough bowls and chopsticks?”

Maou began counting heads.

“Ah, I brought my own.”

Saying so, Chiho took out her own chopsticks.

“Then, please sit by my side, Emi-dono. Let us make up the numbers with disposable chopsticks.”

Suzuno called over to Emi – who had been left to gather dust in a corner – and indicated that she should sit beside herself. She handed over a pair of disposable chopsticks.

The activity at the dining table would surely make anyone wonder if this was truly a Demon King’s Castle. Once everyone had their bowls and chopsticks, Urushihara finally woke up.

“Ah, breakfast already?” he said with an utter lack of shame. Not even everyone rolling their eyes at him seemed to get a reaction.

“Where’s my bowl, chopsticks, and sitting place?”

Maou, Ashiya, Chiho, Emi, and Suzuno were seated all around the kotatsu, leaving nowhere for Urushihara to sit.

In contrast, there was a plastic container and a fork at the computer desk.

“Guests get priority. Also, given that you contribute the least to the family, you get the least privileges too,” Ashiya replied coldly.

“What! It’s not like I can help it, right? Also, saying I’m worse than Yusa is a bad joke, right?!”

“More importantly, you should eat it while it’s hot. Suzuno, Chi-chan, thank you very much.”

Maou’s “more importantly” defeated Urushihara.

“...You watch yourself. Also, isn’t this the box from Suginoya?”

Dejected, he loaded the box with rice from the big bowl.

Even Chiho – who was generally nice to everyone – paid him no heed. Frankly speaking, he had done it to himself.

“Still, are you really alright, Ashiya-san?”

“Thanks for your concern. With Kamazuki-san’s help, I have had ample time to recover, so there is no need to be too concerned. I believe I will be recovered by today.”

“All this is thanks to the vegetables which Chiho-dono took the trouble to bring. Otherwise, these men would eat nothing but meat.”

“That’s true, but I also wanted to cook something which looked like what you would make, Suzuno-san.”

They seemed to be getting along just fine as they spoke. As she heard this, Emi inspected Suzuno.

She had been with Maou yesterday and today, but Emi could not detect anything suspicious in her cooking and her conversation.

And when she thought about it, the perverted robber from yesterday had been hit in the eye by an anti-burglary paintball.

Apparently, the stench from that paint could not be washed off in just one or two days, so given that fact, she could conclude that Suzuno was not yesterday’s attacker.

“I am sure you will swiftly surpass me once you accumulate experience, Chiho-dono.”

“My mom cooks for me at home, so I don’t have many chances to

cook on my own.”

“The chance will come, whether you will it or not. Saying that I make this food by hand for them is merely sugarcoating the fact that I am forcing them to eat my cooking. I brought a lot with me from my hometown when I came here.”

No wonder. Emi knew the contents of the Demon King’s fridge, but she no longer had her doubts about the status of their provisions. However, there was one more question on her mind.

“One could say that I must strive to reduce meal expenditures until I find employment. However this is summer, after all, and food will spoil eventually. Therefore, after discussing the matter with them, I decided to aid these three ravenous men.”

It was unclear whether Suzuno was saying this to put Chiho at ease, or if she had given up on Maou after hearing Emi’s advice.

Come to think of it, she had said she wanted to make it big yesterday. Emi was relaxed and no longer tense, so she decided to change the topic.

“Oh yes, what kind of work do you want to do?”

For some reason, Suzuno looked at Emi’s face with a surprised expression.

As the closest one to her, Emi felt quite worried, but Suzuno immediately glanced to Maou and Ashiya, and nodded as though she had understood something.

“I would not say that I seek something as grandiose as full-time employment. I simply seek to maintain a basic standard of living with servile labor.”

Suzuno’s answer was simple and direct. She had used a term like “servile labor”, but since this was Sasazuka, close to the city, she had a lot of choices. It was also the beginning of the month, so if she found work soon, her living expenses for the next month would be well taken care of.

“Returning to one’s hometown in riches” was a fairly unambitious goal, but that was probably all she could hope to get out of someone she had only chatted with for a while.

Just as Emi was thinking that—

“How about coming to my store?”

So spoke the Demon King, who did not care about the mood in the air and did not think.

“!!”

“!!”

“?”

“...”

“...You can’t.”

Chiho’s body went rigid, and Emi’s eyebrows furrowed. Suzuno seemed a little confused, while Ashiya looked to the sky and Urushihara was grumbling.

“We’ve been running short on people for shifts recently, so I think it should be fine to bring in new blood. Chi-chan’s there too, so I think we should be able to train you up without much trouble.”

Did he not know what other kind of tensions this would cause, or did Maou not know why Chiho had come today?

Away from the table, Urushihara could see an ominous spiral begin to form above the dining table.

“Don’t be in a hurry to decide.”

It could not be helped. Emi spoke up in Chiho’s defense.

“You could think of her as a potential candidate, but there are drawbacks to hiring someone familiar at the workplace as well as benefits. You should think about it.”

Chiho looked at Emi in surprise.

“I see. That does make a lot of sense,” Suzuno nodded in acceptance.

“Thank you, Sadao-dono. I will consider the position of substitute. For all I know, I might need an introduction from you.”

“Ah, ahhh, well, it’s fine.”

“Similarly Chiho-dono. I will be counting on your if the time comes.”

“O-okay.”

Chiho glanced at Emi and nodded at Suzuno. Emi understood what she was trying to say, and shifted her eyes.

Her response was absolutely serious. Her words were sincere, with no subtext. The table she had set was skilfully and satisfyingly laid. Her stiff manner of speaking went with her rigid personality.

Neither Chiho or Emi could find a reason to doubt Suzuno.

“If you don’t mind, would you like me to recommend a new place for you to live?”

Emi wasted no time issuing that invitation.

Emi and Maou might have been poor, but they did not wish to die, so to some extent they needed to forge some ties to society. However, neither of them had connections beyond this area.

If Suzuno was really just an ordinary Japanese person, it would be best for her to live as far from Maou as possible.

“We could learn much as fellow ladies. I doubt that lot could teach you much.”

“Hey, that’s going too far.”

Maou was visibly unhappy, but Emi paid him no heed.

“Even if that weren’t the case, I’m more confident in myself than handing her over to you.”

Emi made a face and sneered at Maou. Maou could only shrug and

let the matter rest.

“You ought to buy some clothes and accessories. It’s for work purposes too. While I don’t mind yukatas, don’t you think you need plain clothes, and office wear like Emi’s and a handbag? That’s what OLs are, you know?”

It was rare enough that Urushihara would take the same side as Emi, and that would have been well and good. However, he then picked up Emi’s handbag to show Suzuno.

“Wait! Don’t touch that! Isn’t being a NEET infectious?!”

“The hell you mean by infectious! I was just looking at it!”

Urushihara pouted in protest at this cruel treatment.

“Urushihara-san really is quite insensitive,” Chiho replied coldly.

“What, what?! You’re all treating me like an idiot!” he whined as he returned to his lair.

“It is true that my cabinets lack appropriate apparel, and I am bereft of bags and footwear. If need be, I would like to purchase some and see what they are like.”

“Don’t tell me you only brought yukatas along?” Emi asked innocently, having only ever seen her in such clothing.

“Indeed. I have yukatas, wooden sandals, and two-toed socks, but I do not have clothing as contemporary as Chiho-dono’s or yours, Emi-dono.”

Everyone in the room looked at each other in the wake of that honest, shocking statement.

“Is... is that strange?”

There was a rare look of panic on Suzuno’s face as she looked around at everyone.

“No, it’s not like it’s strange or anything...” Ashiya slowly replied.

“Suzuno, are you a princess from long ago or something?”

Even Urushihara was taken aback.

Naturally, the two ladies did not show their surprise.

“...Yusa-san... you should take her to a clothing store...”

“Well, if there’s time, I guess.”

Chiho and Emi nodded to each other from where their faces were pressed together.

Maou mumbled from the side.

“Let’s not do anything we’re not good at,” he muttered quietly.

“See you then. Sorry to disturb you so early. Take care, Ashiya-san.”

“The same. Thank you for bringing so much to our house. Demon King-sama, you’d better walk Sasaki-san all the way home.”

Maou and Chiho left the apartment under Ashiya’s watchful eyes. Chiho seemed happy and a little embarrassed by Ashiya’s words, while Maou glared at Ashiya and said: “Are you my mother?!”

“I will support you in all matters personal and public, Demon King-sama. It is only natural that I aid you in the field of etiquette.”

“Honestly... then, I’m going.”

After Ashiya watched a tired-looking Maou and Chiho descend the stairs, he closed the door.

Maou and Chiho started work in the afternoon.

“Are you really willing to let Sasaki-san go home alone? Sasaki-san, who personally made food for you and sent it to the Demon King’s Castle?”

With that, Maou had ended up sending her home.

In the past Ashiya had been unhappy about how close Chiho was getting to Maou, but he was much more generous to anyone who

was helping with the household finances.

Of course, this had a negative effect on the education of Urushihara, who freeloaded endlessly, but Maou and Ashiya had not noticed that.

Dullahan-go's front basket was filled with the bag of storage boxes Chiho had brought along as Maou and Chiho walked side by side.

"...Maou-san, your bicycle doesn't have a back seat."

"Dullahan-go, you mean? But aren't all city bicycles that way?"

"What a shame."

Chiho smiled mischievously, and Maou looked uncomfortable.

"Two people on a bike carries a fine of 20,000 yen, right? I don't think you're even allowed to hold up an umbrella within the city limits," he said.

Maou knew this because he was deathly afraid that the fines for breaking the law would wreak havoc on the household finances.

And so, Chiho gave up on the attempt, with a surprised look on her face.

"I know, I didn't intend to do that, but that's not what it is..."

"What?"

"Nothing! In any case, once we leave Sasazuka Station, let's follow Koushuu Boulevard to Hatagaya."

"Ah, yes."

With that, Chiho advanced half a step ahead of Maou. Chiho's home was a standalone building, and since it was an old building she ought to be living in it with her family. If he went to Chiho's home like this, he might end up facing her family.

"Chi-Chi-chan."

"Hm? What is it?"

Chiho turned her head round as she answered.

“Thank you for the delicious breakfast you made for me this morning.”

“It couldn’t compare to what Suzuno-san made. Still, I’m glad it made you happy.”

He did not know exactly how nuanced her expression and tone were, but Maou was not in the mood to be picky. Instead, he asked her a question he had in his heart.

“Then, ah, don’t your parents mind?”

“Mind what?”

In the face of this vague counter-question, Maou clammed up.

“Ah, no, that... yes, that. Chi-chan, won’t your parents mind if you bring a man like me back to them?”

“Oh, that.”

Chiho put her fingers on her chin as she replied nonchalantly.

“They didn’t comment on it. However, I told them where I was going, and my mother gave me long lectures before letting me go. So in a way, my mother approves!”

That was an unexpected answer.

“And, and your father?”

Two months ago, when they had been involved in a tunnel collapse incident, Chiho looked like she did not want her father to see her with Maou.

“I didn’t tell my father where I was going then, but it’s fine today.”

“Ah, then, then it’s alright, then.”

“Yes. Today, he said, ‘so you have a man you want to cook for’ and cried.”

Both parents approved. This was getting more and more

unexpected.

“Ah, that’s right, that’s right. Suzuno-san’s going out today. What are you going to do about bento?”

“What am I going to do... I, I didn’t really think about that...”

Frankly speaking, what Chiho had seen that day was the first bento Suzuno had made for him. It was not a usual practice, so he truly had not given any thought to what he would be eating at work today. With her back to him, Chiho proposed a solution to that problem.

“In that case, would you mind if I made bento for you?”

“...For me?”

That was all a dazed Maou could answer with. Thus, Chiho turned around unhappily.

“I wouldn’t ask you if it was for anyone else, Maou-san.”

“No, it’s not that... well, ah, Ashiya said that he’d be happier to have me eat your food rather than junk food, Chi-chan. Then, if you don’t mind...”

After gaining his permission, Chiho’s unhappy face blossomed into a beaming smile, and she danced in joy.

“Wonderful! Then, to put Ashiya-san at ease, I’ll need to make sure it’s nutritionally balanced too.”

Of course, Maou had lived in Japan for over a year, and he knew what it meant for a high school girl to go out of her way to cook for a man.

However, there was another thing which bothered Maou greatly.

“I’m talking about that, Chi-chan.”

“Hm?”

“Doesn’t it bother you? That is to say, about us?”

“Ahh, you mean about you, Maou-san.”

Chiho paused here and looked around. Since it was summer, the light skirt she wore floated up in the air. Then, when she was sure that nobody else was around, she plainly said: “You mean the fact that you’re a Demon King from another world?”

“Ahhh, well...”

Maou had not expected her to return such a difficult question to him so easily, and he was tongue-tied once more.

“Indeed... well, it would be wrong to say that it didn’t bother me. I learned about some of it because I came here with Yusa-san, and I exchange emails with her every now and then. So I know a bit of what you did in that Ente Isla place.”

The noonday sun beat down ceaselessly. Chiho exhaled lightly in the sweat-inducing weather.

“But you know, I liked you before I knew all that, Maou-san.”

And then, after she said that, Maou raised his face like his forehead had been flicked.

Chiho looked at Maou’s face, and laughed worriedly.

“Don’t be like that. Maou-san, don’t you know what Alberto-san said?”

“Ah, ahhh, that.”

She was not crestfallen, but Chiho then urged Maou: “Hey, don’t stand in the middle of the road. There’s a car behind us.”

After he pushed his bike to the side of the road, a large shipping truck with a black cow on the side roared past them. |1|

“Maou-san, do you know why I’ve been unhappy for the past two months?”

“I... I’m not too sure.”

“On the day you fought with Urushihara-san, when we went on shift together, you asked me if I wanted to remove my memories,

Maou-san.”

“Ah, ah...”

Chiho took several deep breaths, and then turned around. The summer sun illuminated the path of her spinning skirt and Chiho’s gentle smile.



“In my case, I wouldn’t want to forget someone I liked under any circumstances.”

The wind caressed her briefly-flushed cheeks, and lightly stirred Chiho’s hair.

“...”

Maou took a deep breath, and Chiho smiled.

“Please don’t freeze up from a tiny little shock like that. Is your ambition really to conquer the world?”

“No, but...”

“Come on, move your feet!”

Chiho had Maou completely wrapped around her little finger.

“Yusa-san didn’t want me to regret liking you and she tried to stop me. But since I like you, I’ll decide when I stop liking you.”

Maou was helpless amidst the sweet, fluffy atmosphere, like a rigid stick inserted into a cotton candy machine.

He could not respond to Chiho, who understood the implications of this and turned it into a smile.

“Chi-chan...”

“Therefore, it’s okay if you treat me as your kouhai at work, because it has nothing to do with the fact that I like you, Maou-san.”

The bright summer sun told Maou that Chiho’s smile was genuine.

The Demon King had a distressed look on his face, unable to say anything after being lectured by a teenage human girl in that manner. A Demon King like that could not serve as an example for demonkind.

“...Are all humans this scary?”

“Yup. Please be careful of girls too. They’re not like men. If you underestimate them, you’ll be badly hurt.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Maou nodded with a bitter smile. That seemed to satisfy Chiho.

“Maou-san, you’ll be an official shift manager from today onwards. Do your best.”

After that forcible topic change, the air cleared up and she strode forward.

“Mm, at the very least, I’ll need to work hard to not get my pay cut,” Maou mused as she said so.

“You have been granted great responsibility and your juniors admire you. What an excellent working man you are, Sadao-dono.”

“Exactly! So in order not to drag me down, you need to work hard... or...”

“Hm?”

“Mm.”

“Eh?”

Someone whom Maou had not noticed at all walked by from beside Chiho.

“She loves you, Sadao-dono.”

“Su-su-su...”

“Suzuno-san?!”

Maou and Chiho exclaimed in unison.

“Su-su-su-su-su-suzuno, when when when when when did you arrive here?!”

Suzuno was so close that Chiho’s previously pink face went as red as an apple.

Why did Suzuno, who should have gone shopping with Emi, suddenly appear beside Maou and Chiho?

Dressed in a yukata, wearing old-fashioned wooden sandals and

carrying a somewhat oversized bag, she looked refined and distinguished. However, nobody had heard the sound of her sandals or even sensed her presence until she was right beside them. What was going on?

“When, when did you get here how much did you overhear why didn’t you speak up why are you here shouldn’t you have just gone out?”

Chiho unloaded everything she had on Suzuno as she drew close.

“I caught up with you exactly one minute ago. I began listening from ‘it’s okay if you treat me as your kouhai at work...’ From a distance, I knew that you were discussing something serious, so I did not hail you. I had planned to simply head out to the streets, but then I realised that I had forgotten my wallet. So I asked Emi-dono to go ahead first, with the intention of catching up with her after returning.”

And so, Suzuno answered Chiho’s stream of questions in a calm, placid tone.

“~~~!”

Chiho’s body turned red and she began to emit steam from the top of her head.

In other words, Suzuno had heard every word of her confession of love to Maou.

“Do not worry, Chiho-dono. After all, the feelings you possess for Sadao-dono were already apparent from your attitude towards him this morning.”

“Su-su-su-su-su-suzuno-san! Is this on purpose? Are you doing this on purpose?”

“What is on purpose? Why is your face so red?”

“That’s because you overheard me so I’m embarrassed what are you saying?!”

“It would be a bigger problem if I could not tell what was going on after seeing all of that. In addition, you were organizing your thoughts, so I do not feel that listening to them again would change my impression of...”

“That’s not the problem! It makes sense in theory, but I’m just embarrassed! R-r-really!”

“Chi, Chi-chan, please calm...”

“I feel that you are very attractive when you are honest to your feelings, Chiho-dono. It does not matter who your partner is.”

“~~~~~!!!!!!”

Chiho’s face flushed even redder, and she wailed silently.

“Ah! Wait, Chi-chan!”

Having snatched Dullahan-go from Maou, Chiho stepped on the pedals with all her strength and fled the scene at full speed.

Maou – who had been left behind – reached out to the disappearing, flickering form that was Chiho, and then looked uncomfortably at Suzuno.

“She loves you.”

“She’s still naive and innocent, so please don’t play with her like that... seriously.”

Maou hung his head powerlessly in despair.

“Dammit... I just hope Chi-chan doesn’t get into an accident charging out like that.”

Suzuno stared in surprise at the way Maou was scratching his head as he spoke.

“...How surprising.”

“Ah? Is it that surprising that I can worry about others?”

“Forgive me...”

“Ah – Why are you of all people saying that too? Am I that unreliable to the people around me?” Maou fumed as he vented his spleen.

“How do you feel about people thinking well of you?”

And so, Suzuno suddenly came out with that line. Maou was very hot, so he did not hear it clearly. He frowned as he wiped his sweat with his sleeve.

“Ah? Are you trying to probe my motives here?”

“No... there is no deeper meaning to it.”

“No deeper meaning, you say, after I end up like this... ah, forget it. Yes, when you say it so plainly, even I get worried about someone messing with me. And Chiho is one thing, but when her parents trust me, what kind of answer should I give them, and how much commitment should I show them... what’s with that look in her eyes...”

While he had been addressed with a strange question, he had given an honest answer. After that, Suzuno looked at him like it was the first time she had seen a lifeform like him.

“...Ah, did I say something weird?”

“Wh? Ah, ahhh, ah, no, not at all, I was simply surprised.”

“So like I said, just forget it. Besides, aren’t you keeping Emi waiting? That’s more important than this, right?”

“...Ah, ahhhh, indeed.”

Suzuno, who had been spaced out, snapped back to reality. Maou was still wiping his sweat as he said: “Sasazuka Station, right? Let me tell you a shortcut.”

“Eh...”

Suzuno took another breath in surprise, but Maou ignored her reaction.

“Take this alley and follow it for a while. You’ll come across the Bosatsu-doori^{|2|} shopping street. Then turn left and follow the street until you see the front of the station.”

“Ah... I, I understand. My thanks.”

“Also, if you want to work, do your research. No matter how tight times are, it’s better to have a cell phone. The shops in front of the station are fine, but if nothing catches your eye, let Emi take you to the city center to shop. See you, then.”

“...Ah, forgive me.”

Maou sighed in the direction where Chiho had vanished, then turned his back on Suzuno and headed back to the apartment.

Suzuno could not help but watch him leave, but after he took a few steps away, Maou turned back, as though he had forgotten something.

“I hope you can find a good job. There’ll be masses of people in the city itself, so don’t be frightened.”

After saying that, he turned and left without waiting for Suzuno’s answer.

Suzuno was frozen on the spot, unable to move.

“Got your wallet?”

Emi was waiting at Sasazuka Station’s fare gate when she spotted Suzuno. The latter nodded dumbly.

“Ah, ahhh, I am all right. Forgive me for making you wait so long.”

“It’s fine. What happened? You look a little out of it.”

“No... more importantly, I believe we will now book passage aboard a vehicle called a train?”

Emi had no idea why she was asking about a train, but she paid it no heed and nodded.

“Yes. It’s only one stop from Sasazuka to Shinjuku, but it’s a fair bit away on foot. Ah, if we go to Motoyawata by accident, we’ll have two more stops to travel and we’ll end up on the Shinjuku Outer Line, so we have to be careful. Do you have your Suica or PASMO?
|3| If not, you’ll have to buy a ticket. It’s much easier once you apply for one of those.”

“Ahh, I, I am afraid I do not possess one of those.”

Suzuno looked around in discomfort.

“In truth I have never ridden a train before.”

And then she dropped a bombshell.

“...Eh?”

Emi had no idea how old Suzuno was, but what kind of godforsaken place did she live in to not have taken a train until she was old enough to live on her own? Emi looked doubtfully at Suzuno.

“But is it true they use watermelons |4| as passage permits? Something so heavy...”

“Eh?”

“Hm?”

Just now, Suzuno seemed to have pronounced it a little strangely.

“...I believe I have said something odd. Do forgive me.”

“Odd, you say... ah, well, let’s get tickets. We’ll worry about the Suica next time. Tickets...”

Saying so, Emi realised that Suzuno was staring dumbly at the ticket vending machine.

“...I’ve heard a little about it, but how exactly did you come to Sasazuka?”

How could she not know how to buy a ticket? No matter where she had been born, she was already in Tokyo. Not taking public

transport even once during her week here was not impossible, but it would be terribly inconvenient.

Suzuno sensed Emi's doubts, and she immediately replied without hiding the discomfort on her face: "I used a Gate and arrived directly in Sasazuka. I hope you will forgive my inadequate knowledge."

"Ahh, this..."

Suzuno's response had been so natural and matter-of-fact that Emi had almost missed it.

"...What did you just say?"

Emi went rigid as she realised Suzuno had said something unbelievable.

"Like I said, I disguised myself and used a Gate to arrive directly in Sasazuka, so I am not used to city life..."

"Hang, hang on, hang on a bit."

Emi's heart was racing, and she unconsciously put her hand to her chest. She looked around, and then looked at Suzuno, a tensed expression on her face.

"You, you're from Ente Isla?!"

Earlier, she had concluded that she was a strange but harmless girl. However, Emi's heart was now halfway into a state of panic.

On the other hand, Suzuno was still looking at Emi with eyes wide.

"Did you not already know?!"

How had she discovered this? The more Emi spoke, the more worked up she got.

"I didn't say anything like that!"

"But you did! You said, 'Are you targeting Maou as well' to me, did you not?"

"Ehhhh?!"

“I did not think you would say so in front of the man himself, so I panicked. But then you warned me that I would be sorry for getting close to the Demon King and that I should not be foolish.”

“Ehhhhhhhhhh?!”

“I am a veteran of many battlefields, but I cannot discount the counsel of yourself as the Hero. However, even if I immediately vacated that site, I would have nowhere else to go. Therefore, I pray you will aid me. Besides, did you not promise to succour me when you furnished me with your contact information?”

“Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh–?!”

Emi might have been in a state of utter confusion, but she finally understood what Suzuno was saying.

And then, she also knew that both of them had taken away the wrong thing from her first conversation with Suzuno.

“Given that you discovered my true identity, you should not be going ‘ehhhh’ and so on.”

“How on earth did I discover your true identity, anyway?!” Emi fumed.

“Do you not find it odd?! An adorable girl who just moved in, barging into a room full of men and taking care of their every need? That is hardly likely, is it not?”

“I thought about that, but hearing you say all that to me now just makes me mad!”

She had worked so hard to keep a mysterious girl from getting caught up in her struggles, and this was the result? Being involved was one thing, but she had been tied to the whole matter from the beginning.

“Then why did you tell me about targeting the Demon King, hm?”

“Ah? Ahhh, well, about that...”

Obviously, she could not say that she had mistaken her for having

feelings for Maou. It was a little shameful to admit it, but Suzuno was the main reason why that possibility even existed.

“And, and why did you ask me if I was ‘having an intimate relationship with Sadao’ or whatnot?!”

The answer was simple enough.

“Because I learned of you fighting alongside the Demon King!”

Emi’s eyes went wide.

Apart from the inhabitants of the Demon King’s Castle, the only people who knew about the Hero Emilia and the Demon King Satan fighting together were Chiho, Emerada, Alberto, and Olba.

Emerada and Alberto would never spread rumors which would harm Emi. In other words, she could only conclude that Olba – who had been captured by the Japanese police – had somehow gotten that information to Ente Isla.

There were very few people from Ente Isla who could obtain information from Olba, which heavily cut down on the possibilities of her true identity.

Emi decided to first emphasise her innocence.

“Don’t kid around! I was forced into a situation where we had to work together to defeat the enemy! Don’t say stupid things like we fought together!”

While it would be considered an allied battle in reality, Emi had drawn a stern line in her heart.

Emi felt that she had fought Lucifer two months ago while maintaining an adversarial relationship with the Demon King.

The problem was whether or not others would believe that.

To bystanders, it would look like the Hero and Demon King joined forces to defeat an Archbishop of the Holy Church. And then, she had been attacked on the night when she had given out her phone number and address.

“So you *did* think that I would join forces with the Demon King to take revenge on the Church! Was that why you attacked me at the convenience store in that getup yesterday?!”

It was quite likely that the people close to Olba would carry on his grudge against her.

She had no idea of what Olba’s schemes were. It might have simply been the Archbishops’ revenge plot at work.

However, for some reason, Suzuno – who seemed a little suspicious for some reason – did not seem to get Emi’s meaning right away. She frowned in confusion and meshed her fingers in thought.

“Attacking a... seaweed soup? |5| What are you talking about?”

“I should be asking that! Are you getting it wrong on purpose? Or are you doing that by accident?!”

Emi grabbed her head.

“I was attacked on the day I told you my address! By someone from Ente Isla! I’m not trying to cover for the Demon King, but that guy had some ability to negate the power of the holy sword so he couldn’t be a demon, which leaves you...!”

Emi got more and more agitated as she spoke, until she found herself rooted in place.

“Wait, wait, me? Attack you? I did not do such a thing! I knew you were the Hero Emilia! I know how strong you are as a Church Knight! I am not unskilled, but fighting an unfavorable battle would be the height of foolishness!”

Emi carefully studied Suzuno, who was trying to explain herself with a look of shock on her face.

The perverted scythe wielder had taken a hard shot in the eye with a paintball.

She had not noticed due to her contoured features and crystal

skin, but at a closer look, Suzuno was not wearing makeup.

The special pigment in the paintballs could not be washed off by conventional detergents. If Suzuno were the robber from last night, her eye ought to be a neon orange.

When she had sat beside her, she had not detected any abnormalities or any scents designed to mask an odor.

She decided to end her inquisition of the baffled Suzuno here. Emi's face went hard as she asked: "...In any case, can you tell me more about this? I can't just let it slide. Who are you, where are you from, and why are you hanging around in the Demon King's Castle?"

It spilled out just like that. She spoke loudly, but nobody around them could make sense of the details.

Emi first scanned her surroundings for any trace of Maou or Ashiya before speaking.

"My real name is Crestia Bell. I am the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council."

Emi had not expected to hear the phrase "Doctrinal Correction Council", so she turned once more to Suzuno's face.

"I apologize if there were any miscommunications. Therefore, I beseech your air once more. Can you help me, Emilia Justina the Hero? I will not harm you."

Suzuno bowed sincerely to Emi. Emi noticed that the four-petaled hair ornament on her head was red and shaped like a cabbage flower⁶. She sighed and looked at the station clock.

"In any case, I don't want to be late for work, so give me the details after we reach Shinjuku."

With that, she headed for the faregate.

"Ahhh? Ehh?"

Suzuno had not expected Emi – who knew her true identity – to

prioritize her Japanese company over herself. She narrowed her eyes and watched her leave.

“That’s just how Japan is. Oi, let’s go.”

Emi swiped her PASMO card with some force before passing the gate.

“Wait, wait! Uwah!”

“Let, let go of me! How can you stop here...”

“...”

She saw that Suzuno – who had been trying to barge through the automatic faregate without a ticket – had gotten her obi stuck in the barrier.

Emi thought of the culture gap and the trouble she would get into once they reached Shinjuku, and her mood turned melancholy.

She had learned from the documents Olba had left behind that the Hero Justinia Emilia and the Demon King Satan were still alive.

The divine artifact known as the “Heavenly Silver of Evolution” was the main component of Emilia’s holy sword.

She found traces of Sonar pulses launched at another world, tuned for traces of holy magic.

In addition, there were the fragments of the Demon King Satan’s horn which Emi had shattered. Countless Sonar pulses had also been launched in order to look for a matching demonic magic profile.

While there were traces of reactions corresponding to the Demon King Satan, she had not found more concrete evidence than that.

However, she had not reported all this to the Archbishops. That was because it would not be strange for her entire team to be wiped out on the spot if she did that.

By coincidence, a message arrived on a Link Crystal – which served as an Idea Link medium – while she was searching Olba’s study. The message came from Olba.

It was a chaotic blend of thoughts, but she knew he was still alive, could not open a Gate from the other world, had been captured, and needed help.

She felt that he was being terribly selfish, but she could not ignore what she heard next.

He said: 『The Hero Emilia has aligned with the Demon King in the other world and they’re fighting together.』

“As someone from the mission ministry, as an expert at analyzing unknown countries... I am deeply ashamed. This Japan exceeds my comprehension. Where could anyone find such a city in Ente Isla?”

Suzuno was feeling a little tired.

Her turmoil had begun from the moment she had been caught in the automatic faregate. While simply buying a ticket and crossing again should have solved that problem, Suzuno could not tell the difference between an IC card and a ticket. She pressed the ticket on the sensor, and the gate closed once more.

“Must you obstruct me at every turn?!”

That cry seemed to be the starter’s pistol for her misfortune. She fell near the end of an escalator ride, sending her wooden sandals flying. She primly responded to the automated announcements within the train car, drawing puzzled stares from everyone around her. When the train jolted due to changing lines, she lost her balance and fell.

At Shinjuku, she was awed by the sight of so many people. She mistook the Red Cross of a blood donation center for a church. She was shocked when she reached the surface and saw many tall buildings, countless people, and streams of traffic.

When they reached the coffeeshop “Not Enough” near Emi’s workplace, Suzuno was visibly tired of being surprised, and her blank face looked even more hollow than before.

Incidentally, the store’s name seemed to have originated from their endless quest to seek new heights of service performance and social refinement, refusing to allow themselves to rest on their laurels.

“Then... what is this...”

“Is it like the time you saw a TV and said, ‘I can’t believe there’s tiny people inside such a flat board!’ or something...?”

“Don’t bring that up!”

Suzuno pounded the table, her face red.

According to Suzuno, she had investigated the phenomena that were computers, cell phones and televisions. However, she was hard-pressed to contain her own shock after seeing them for herself.

“According to what I discovered, it ought to have been a bigger box! It would not have been so surprising if one had put a person into a box-shaped machine!”

“It’s not a matter of the box, nor do you put people inside.”

Emi took the cup of ice coffee that had been brought over to her and downed it to wet her throat.

Suzuno had ordered black tea, but for some reason she ended up spraying the creamer everywhere when she opened it up.

“What did you watch to understand Japan, anyway?”

Emi shot a very suspicious look at her. That was because despite Suzuno saying she had studied up on Japan, everything she did seemed utterly incongruent with modern Japan.

“After learning the kimono was Japan’s traditional dress, I used jidaigekis, where they appeared most often, as learning references.

Most of everything else was learned from documentaries which originated from the recent Showa era,” Suzuno recounted.

“Well, that explains a lot of the weird mistakes you’ve been making,” Emi smiled bitterly. Then, with some eagerness, she asked: “Did you have any period dramas you liked?”

Emi was a big fan of period dramas, but there was nobody around her whom she could about period dramas with. Therefore, she felt that perhaps she might be able to achieve an understanding with this girl who also liked period dramas.

“Hmm... I like ‘Storm Montaro’, ‘Lone Lion and Cub’, and ronin movies like ‘The Slashing Trio’. ‘Mito Fukushogun’ and ‘Raging Shogun’ don’t really excite me, however.”

“...Ah, in that case...”

Suzuno and Emi had incompatible tastes.

“Haaa... Then let’s return to the topic of Sasazuka. So what business does the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council have with me? What did you have in mind when you moved in next to the Demon King’s Castle?”

After recomposing herself, Emi returned to the main topic.

Having taken into consideration Suzuno’s attitude towards Emi, she might have claimed to be a member of the Doctrinal Correction Council, but she was not an assassin after Emi’s life.

But if that was the case, then Emi had no idea what motivated Suzuno.

Emi carefully studied Suzuno’s every move and word.

“Yes, let us speak frankly.”

Suzuno leaned towards Emi, a nervous look on her face.

“My first objective was to verify your survival. However, after investigating the traces Olba Meyer left behind, I realised what sort of life the Demon King was living. Therefore, if I watched the

Demon King...”

“The Hero would show up. To think I was caught like a rat in a trap.”

Emi could only shrug at having taken the bait.

“I must apologize for Olba Meyer’s untowardness. After seeing your attitude towards me when you did not know I was from Ente Isla, I knew that the rumors of your fighting alongside the Demon King were a fabrication by Olba. His will does not reflect that of everyone in the Church. At the very least, I am on your side.”

Now that the main topic had been reached, Suzuno leaned even further forward.

“I hope you will join forces with me to defeat the Demon King Satan, and then return to Ente Isla. There, we can show people that you are still alive and and reform the Church which is attempting to cover up Olba’s wayward actions.”

“Hell no.”

“How can you reply so fast?!”

Suzuno nearly knocked over her tea when she collapsed spectacularly on the table.

“Surely you should give the matter some consideration!”

“No, I have no intention of helping the Church.”

Emi mixed some sugar into her ice coffee and stirred.

“Did you not promise to help me?”

“Agreements which I was not aware of are null and void.”

“You will be given the appropriate status and position when you return to Ente Isla!”

“I don’t *care* what the Church and their vassal nations think,” Emi said flatly. Then, she looked outside the window and Suzuno followed her eyes.

“Over there.”

After getting Suzuno’s attention with a stern expression, Emi indicated the tunnel entrance outside the coffeeshop.

“You are the highest-ranking member of an organization that was willing to kill all those people in a subway collapse just to murder the Demon King and myself. Do you now understand why I can’t trust you? You *do* know Olba came here too, right?”

“...”

Suzuno looked between Emi and the outside, and nodded. However, the look on her face said that she could hardly believe it.

“Could it be that the incidents until now...”

“Emerada and Alberto know exactly how much trouble Olba and Lucifer caused for Japan in order to kill me. Why don’t you ask Lucifer himself? You do know Urushihara was once Lucifer, right?”

Emi put down her glass and continued: “There was a reason why I suspected you were the robber last night. Still, even discounting that, I have no intention of helping you if you’re a member of the Doctrinal Correction Council.”

“...Why is that?”

Emi’s answer was very simple.

“Slaying the Demon King is the Hero’s job.”

Emi stated that in a matter-of-fact tone, which only served to upset Suzuno more.

“Like I said, I am also here to slay the Demon King. If we work together...”

“Defeating him is my job. Do not interfere.”

“Why?! Even now...?!”

“You’re in the Doctrinal Correction Council... no, the Inquisition. Don’t tell me you need me to explain every little thing to you?”

As Emi insistently changed the terminology from “Doctrinal Correction Council” to “Inquisition”, Suzuno felt herself growing faint.

“I do not know why you came here. I apologize if I have upset you.”

Emi sensed the tension in the air around Suzuno, and she relaxed her tone a little. However: “I don’t want anyone to make use of my slaying of the Demon King. Please understand that.”

Saying so, Emi glanced at the clock in the store. It was almost time for work.

“Also, I don’t know why you’re giving them food, but here’s a warning for you. It doesn’t matter what kind of pointless stunts you pull with them, they’ll see through it immediately. He is the Demon King, you know.”

“...I thank you for your kind words.”

“I’m hunting the Demon King for my own reasons. Therefore, please stay away from him and return to Ente Isla. Do not come here again for the Demon King.”

Emi picked up the bill, then fished out a thin, rolled up booklet from her handbag and then handed them to Suzuno.

“That said, you have your own problems too. So here’s a free recruitment magazine which I picked up from the train station. Still, there’s a lot more in other places. Try looking on your own.”

Suzuno stared in stunned silence between Emi’s face and the pig-covered job-seekers’ magazine.

“Read it if you plan to stay here for a while and learn how to work in this world. Your vocabulary and sense of style are way out of date. Look at the passers-by and research the times. I have to go to work after this. I trust you’ll be fine going back by yourself?”

Emi paid the bill and left a stunned Suzuno behind in the store.

She pressed her hand to her forehead in fatigue, and sighed.

“Well, it ought to be okay if I tell her in advance.”

She had not been doing much this whole week, so hopefully she would not get mad if Emi refused her.

However, this was different from Olba. Suzuno wanted to bring her back, so she had to avoid making Emi unhappy.

This had been an action-packed morning. Did she still have the strength to finish the day’s work? Perhaps she should buy a real energy drink, and not that Holy Vitamin stuff.

“Ah, Emi, good morning.”

She turned around at the greeting.

“...Ah, good morning, Rika.”

It happened to be time for her colleague Rika to arrive at the workplace. She was Emi’s closest friend in Japan.

“This is rare, having breakfast at a coffeeshop?”

“Well, I guess you could say that. I was meeting a friend.”

“Ehhh... so you’ve got secret relationships going on, what a surprise. Who is it? Is he a man?”

“Hardly. She’s a girl.”

As they chatted about the inanities of everyday life, Emi headed to work with her friend.

“I-I’m truly sorry!”

Chiho bowed repeatedly to Maou – who had just gotten on shift around noon – like a click beetle. She had brought Dullahan-go with her.

Maou accepted it with a smile, but Chiho was embarrassed and could not look him in the eye.

After parking Dullahan-go behind the store, Maou tried to coax Chiho to go back in with him.

“...Eh?”

He frowned as he looked inside the store. Even Chiho – whose cheeks were practically burning with embarrassment – noticed something strange as well.

Maou was supposed to clock in at 12. The Hatagaya Mags was located between a residential district and a commercial district, so the lunch crowd should have started thronging the streets by now. However, the usual peak hour crowds were nowhere to be seen.

Kisaki was all smiles as she stood at the counter. Behind her, the morning shift trainees surrounded Kisaki at a distance. Therefore, Maou surmised that something was wrong.

The grin Kisaki had plastered on her face seemed to be because she was worried about boosting sales.

“Good, good morn–”

“Don’t get excited.”

“Just now... yes?”

Kisaki responded in a stiff tone to Maou’s nervous greeting.

“We’ve fallen behind Sentucky in customers in the six hours since we opened this morning.”

“Eh?”

“We’re at 80% of customer numbers compared to yesterday. I get mad when I think about whether we’ve been roped into one of Sentucky’s schemes.”

They were rivals, no matter what, and they were clearly challenging them. In addition, given the weather and the time of week yesterday, it was not impossible to have 80% of yesterday’s sales, but for some reason, Kisaki was convinced that Sentucky was up to something.

“Why... Why do I have to start going for my seminar on a day like this?!”

Kisaki growled angrily while keeping the smile on her face. The morning shift crew shuddered.

“This is a nightmare scenario, but if the hourly customer figures keep falling at this pace...”

Kisaki looked off into the distance, followed by Maou, Chiho, and then the other workers. Kisaki’s should have been the smile of a beautiful woman, but why did it feel so cold?

“Well, it would be quite a pain to end up in Greenland, am I wrong? Assistant Store Leader Maou Sadao?”

“Oh yes. Quite a pain.”

To think a Demon King would know how it felt to be a frog being eyed by a snake.

Kisaki reached over the counter and grabbed Maou by the shoulders, her eyes filled with a bloodthirsty gleam.

“I permit you to use *any means necessary* to defeat Sentucky.”

“YES MA’AM!”

Maou, Chiho, and even the other workers drew themselves up for an immaculate salute.

Of course, by “any means necessary”, she meant by raising their sales, not by physically destroying Sentucky.

Even the crowd at lunchtime could hardly be considered “peak-hour”, whereas the new Sentucky Fried Chicken outlet in the distance looked to be thriving.

The hateful grin of the Sentucky Fried Chicken mascot, a bearded gentleman called Major Fires, was everywhere.

After Kisaki the Sales Demon left the store with a fiendish look on her face, Maou quickly pulled himself together.

They offered as much personal service as possible without risking censure. They displayed yogurt on the front of the collar boxes. He ordered Chiho and the other crew members to actively and vigorously promote limited-duration coffee offers for as long as it took.

However, all those efforts were in vain. When the receipts for 2pm were tallied, they had taken in 70% the amount of the previous day.

“Ah – we’ve lost... it’s like this even from the first day...”

It was not just Maou who felt this way, but Chiho and the other crew members as well.

Of course, it was not as though they were not getting customers at all, but they could not obtain figures which would please Kiseki in the face of Sentucky Fried Chicken’s opposition.

The overly effective air conditioning cooled the body and mind, while simultaneously reminding everyone of “Greenland”. Just then: “Welcome!”

The automatic door admitted a new customer, and Maou called out loudly to them.

This person walked straight to the counter and immediately said:

“Forgive me for bothering you amidst your work. Is the store leader in?”

He was a small-framed man, with a slender body. He wore a huge pair of sunglasses on his handsome face, and from the briefcase he was holding he looked to be some sort of salesman. However, given his small frame and wobbly sunglasses, he looked more like a kid dressing like a yakuza.

Maou knew the names and faces of just about every single executive who had anything to do with the Hatagaya Station Branch, so he figured that he was an external salesman or something along those lines.

Maou was very conscientious about his role as the person-in-charge while the store leader was not around, and it filled him with confidence even in his role as an assistant store leader. Maou paid no heed to the confused crew members and strode out from behind the counter to stand in front of the man.

“I am very sorry, but the store leader Kisaki-san is not in today. I am the shift manager Maou Sadao. If there is anything which needs to be said, it can be said to me.”

The man arched his brows in an exaggerated fashion.

“So you’re Maou Sadao? I’ve heard a bit about you.”

The short man somehow managed to look down on Maou despite being physically shorter than him. When one heard him speak, it was like he was talking down to Maou.

“A man who possesses motivation, excellence, and adaptability utterly unfitting of the name.”

“Haha... well that’s embarrassing.”

What did “utterly unfitting of the name” even mean? Emi had once said it did not sound like a young man’s name, but it felt wrong coming from the mouth of someone who seemed to be making a mockery of greetings.

He could smell an overpowering fragrance wrapping around him; probably some kind of deodorant or perfume. However, such powerful manmade scents would interfere with the work operations of a crew member in the food and beverage industry.

“Ah, pardon me, but have we met before?”

Maou had only worked in a fast food restaurant, so where had this fellow heard of him?

“No, we haven’t,” the short man replied as he turned up the corners of his mouth in a smile.

“Even so, I’ve known about you for a long time.”

He was being difficult. Maou decided to gloss over his rudeness.

Then, the man slapped his fist into his palm, like he had thought of something.

“Forgive me, it took a while. That’s the kind of person I am.”

Saying so, he pulled out a card case from his pocket, produced a name card, and offered it to Maou. Maou accepted it politely, with both hands, read it, and froze.

“The Sentucky Fried Chicken’s store leader...”

A wave of unease swept across the MgRonald’s.

“I am Sarue Mitsuki. I do hope we’ll get along as fellow operators.”

The man called Sarue laughed and scratched his head.

“I should have come over earlier to greet you, but I was delayed because I was busy. Do accept my apologies.”

Maou could feel a fireball bursting in his brain.

“Even so, Hatagaya really is a good place! It’s located between a residential and a commercial district. The customers are ample and the ladies are all beautiful. I applaud the good eye of whoever chose to open a MgRonald’s outlet here.”

“...Hah?” Chiho mumbled in surprise from behind Maou.

“Since this is the first day of business, I had some free time so I decided to come and visit. Still, I’m glad that I’m not interfering with anything by saying hello.”

Bombarded by these indirect barbs, Maou could clearly hear an irritation in his mind which did not exist in the real world.

“Regretfully, our store’s customer numbers aren’t as high as we’d like. Fortunately, that gives me the free time to greet you.”

However, anyone whose customer service attitude would crumble in the face of this was not fit to be the afternoon shift manager for the Hatagaya Branch of MgRonald’s. As the assistant store leader,

Maou Sadao counterattacked with all the force he could muster.

“No, no, we’re only doing well because we’re new on the block. After some time passes, things will return to their normal state of affairs.”

That was an even more potent counterattack. It drew upon self-deprecation to highlight their own superior position.

Maou felt that if Kisaki were here, she would have chased Sarue away with an uncharacteristic lack of patience. However, Maou was only temporarily in charge of the store and could not do such things. In the end, Maou’s actions would ultimately be attributed to Kisaki.

Maou was quite surprised by how he could handle this matter with no stress whatsoever.

“Then I’ll leave you to it. As fellow comrades who run stores in front of the train station, we must both do our best. While the store leader happened to be out this time, we shall pay you a visit some other time. At that point, we’ll be in your care.”

So, get lost already, Maou did not say as he replied politely.

Sarue seemed surprised, but he kept a mocking smile on his face regardless.

“This... it doesn’t feel like the you I know,” he said as he saw Maou bowing to him.

“While it is somewhat of a shame that I did not get to see the ravishing beauty that is your store leader, how about a meal to go, in honor of this rare... eh?”

Sarue’s gaze stopped on Chiho, who was at her duties.

“So beautiful...”

“Hah?”

When Maou followed Sarue’s eyes to Chiho, Sarue immediately shifted to Chiho’s counter.

“What a bright future you must have, my dear girl. Please use those dainty hands of yours to prepare the set meal I shall order.”

Chiho immediately frowned as those words.

It was clear that Sarue had come to issue a challenge to MgRonald's. In addition, Chiho was briefly tempted to tell him off for being a pervert despite the fact that he was a customer.

“Sasaki-san.”

Maou's business-like address was like a blade which cut that notion short.

“Prepare the customer's order.”

“...Yes.”

Maou bade Sarue come to the counter. Sarue glanced at Maou, and then his gaze lingered over Chiho until he got what he wanted.

“You don't seem happy.”

Chiho had been frowning ever since Sarue left the store.

“Still, that Sarue chap was definitely here to mess with us. Maou-san, aren't you mad that he said all that?”

“The fact that someone I trained is actually angry about someone looking down on the store makes me prouder than receiving a raise, Chi-chan. Frankly speaking, it makes me quite happy.”

“...Mm.”

Chiho's face was tight and her mouth was shut, but her cheeks colored from her embarrassment.

“...Maou-san, you're usually so slow, but you only say these things at times like this,” she muttered in a voice which Maou could not clearly hear. She had been prepared to be angry since someone had insulted their store, but she did not want Maou to see how goofy she looked after being praised, so she hid her face.

“If we treat bad customers poorly, we’ll only be sinking to the level of the competition. All we need to do is treat them all the same, and we’ll finish our jobs and maintain our dignity at the same time. A customer is a customer, regardless of who pays the bill.”

Maou rubbed his nose as he arranged the shelves.

“How about it, did I sound like an assistant store leader?”

“If you have to ask, then the answer is no,” Chiho grinned.

“Ah~ still, I’m sorry I couldn’t stop him hitting on you. It must have felt awful.”

“How could that be? Don’t worry about it. Anything that shrimp store leader says...”

Chiho hurriedly shook her head, but Maou nodded serenely.

“Shrimp store leader, that’s a good one,” Maou grinned as he clapped. The other crew members – who shared Chiho’s thoughts – nodded in approval.

“Still, anyone working under that store leader must be really unfortunate. Does he even know what he’s doing, running a food and beverage place like that? People must be cursing him for such strong cologne.”

It might have been a rival store, but Maou was a little worried. Since they were located along the same shopping street, bad reviews for Sentucky might affect MgRonald’s too. It was quite annoying to be unable to take joy in their misery.

“Is it alright to greet customers with sunglasses on?” Chiho asked.

“Ah... Ashiya said sunglasses were intended to deal with UV radiation. It might work from a health perspective, and recently it’s been hard to tell apart fashion from protective gear.”

Also, it was not that he was bothered by Sarue’s unexpected response, but their priority now was to find a way to boost their number of customers and sales before closing time.

“Alright, time to give it all I’ve got.”

“There’s no way I’ll lose!”

Chiho shouted with the joy of a demon which had claimed a fresh body, and it startled the other crew members.

“Then – bring on a few hundred more! I’ll work even harder than them!”

Morale rose.

“That’s the spirit. We will be gaining solid intelligence on the enemy from today onwards, so it’s time to be nervous.”

“Enemy intelligence?”

Chiho’s question made Maou puff out his chest and nod.

“A capable man can even make use of his parents, while subordinates exist to be used. He’ll understand if I phrase it as a necessary expense to ensure my continued income.”

Even at evening, the heatwave continued covering Tokyo in summer, like it did during the morning.

Emi and Rika left work together. Emi hesitated when Rika asked if she had plans for dinner.

“There’s a place I need to go.”

She sneakily evaded the invitation.

Suzuno had spoken very forcefully this morning, but thanks to Emi’s firm response, Suzuno might have some sort of response planned.

“What a shame. Does it have something to do with your friend from this morning? Then it can’t be helped. You need to go on a date with me while this Takano Fruits Park discount voucher is still valid.”

A colorful fruit buffet flashed through Emi’s mind, but she

mobilized her mightiest self-restraint and sense of purpose to cleave apart her frustration.

It was because of this that when she stepped out of her building, she was shocked by the sight of Suzuno in a completely different outfit from this morning. An embarrassing look of unease crossed her face.

Emi even wanted to pretend that she did not know her and escape, but:

“Emi-dono, are your labors are finally over?”

Suzuno called out to Emi as she ran over. Forced into a corner, Emi looked at Suzuno in surprise.

She seemed to be wearing a light yukata with designs of flowers floating on water, from the Tokyo travel booklet. She had a cross-shaped hair ornament and carried many bags containing ladies' products from the fashion giant Kakui's, while there was what looked like a box of sandals in a plastic DEF MART bag.

Her shopping bag was decorated with goldfish and various other patterns, and it had a balloon tied to it. One could see mineral water bottles and Moonbucks coffee tumblers poking out from within.

“If you went this far, why not pick something other than a yukata?”

Even Emi could only manage that as the first thing out of her mouth. What had happened to this person who had offered to help Emi slay the Demon King within half a day?

“Missionaries are often called upon to assess the economic situation of a location for future missions. Also, many girls on the street wear kimonos.”

“You... have that much money?”

“When I came here, I brought some easily-tradable goods. I sold some of them to a shop called Mugi-hyo^{|7|}.”

Suzuno was talking about a famous pawnshop. But what could a highly-placed cleric mean by “easily-tradable goods”?

Suzuno produced a cutely-patterned card pouch from her handbag.

“How about that? I have a Suica too! I even managed to top it up by myself!”

Saying so, she presented the penguin logo on the IC card to Emi and Rika with some excitement.

“...Amazing, amazing.”

Up till now, this was on the level of a child’s first errand.

Emi was wondering if she should pat Suzuno’s head when Rika asked:

“Is this your friend, Emi?”

“That – ah...”

Emi was briefly annoyed.

“Well, yeah, I guess.”

“Why are you waffling like that?”

Excuses flitted through her brain, but all of them had involved lying about her origins, so she had hesitated. Suzuno seemed to have thought of something, and she turned to introduce herself to Rika.

“Greetings. My name is Kamazuki Suzuno, and Emi-dono has been taking care of me following my move to Tokyo.”

“Ah, pleased to meet you. I’m Suzuki Rika. As you can see, I’m Emi’s colleague.”

“Speaking of which, Kamazuki-san, have you moved to Eifuku-cho yet?”

Rika’s question was only natural. When she said she was in Emi’s care, it was only obvious to imagine she had moved near Emi’s

home.

However, Emi suddenly had a bad feeling about this.

“No, I moved to Sasazuka.”

“Sasazuka? Emi, that’s at Eifuku-cho, right?”

“Y-yes, it is.”

What are you about to say, Emi questioned Suzuno with her eyes, but Suzuno did not look at Emi.

“Not long after I moved here, Emi – who had come to visit her neighbors – gave me a warm welcome.”

“Ah – I see... Ah? Emi, you live in Sasazuka?”

Rika seemed to have made a connection, but then she stopped halfway as though her words had gotten stuck in her throat. Suzuno swiftly turned her eyes to Emi in the meantime. By the time Rika had finished clearing her throat she had overheard the intention behind Emi and Suzuno’s dialogue.

“I was waiting here because I wanted to ask Emi-dono another favor.”

“...What were you going to ask?”

Emi had rejected her flatly this morning, and Suzuno should not have been the sort of person who would repeat the same request in front of someone unrelated. While she knew what Suzuno was here for, she could not deal with her without knowing her objective.

If she tried to ditch Rika, who had stumbled into the snare, it might make her suspicious instead. Therefore, she had used a stern tone instead.

“...Ah? Is it bad that I’m here? Should I leave?”

She had succeeded in inducing her friend – who could read the mood keenly – to say those words. However, Suzuno continued: “No, it’s nothing important. It will be done in a moment. I actually

wanted to ask Emi-dono to visit Sadao-dono's workplace with me."

"Sadao? Sounds familiar..."

"Wait, what are you saying..."

Suzuno had calmly mentioned Maou in front of Rika. Emi realized her intention, but it was too late.

"I would like to see the workplace of Maou Sadao. I know you do not wish me to approach him, but I cannot simply accept those words at face value and back down."

"..."

Emi grabbed her head, while Suzuno continued misusing the Japanese language.

In this moment, Rika – who had been listening to their conversation – clapped her hands and exclaimed:

"Now I remember! That Maou Sadao is Emi's boyfriend!"

"See... it ended up like this..." Emi groaned.

"He's the person Emi was talking about when she came to my place! What's this, is there a hint of blood in the air?"

"Wait, Rika, don't..."

If one took those words literally, one might get that impression. It was true that both of those women wanted to physically find a way to Maou's heart.

Rika smiled to try and lighten the mood, and then waved her hands:

"Well, ah, please allow me as a woman, and as an outsider, to say something. Ah, I might be being a busybody here, but disputes like this can't be resolved from one side alone. Therefore, in order to fully close the matter, it's best to hash things out with that Maou fellow together. It might not feel very good, but wouldn't that avoid a lot of trouble in the future?"

“Like I said, Rika, this isn’t...”

Emi tried to stop Rika, whose imagination was running wild, and began to panic.

“...Maybe it truly is that way.”

Suzuno seemed to be considering her proposal seriously as she answered Rika..

“Wait!”

“Then, where’s that chap?”

“I believe he works at the Hatagaya McGonald’s.”

“Wait!!!”

“Emi, calm down. Hatagaya, is it? We can go there right away from here, right? Then, the sooner we go the better, right?”

“I, I’m very calm! There’s no need to do...”

“It’s fine, don’t panic, calm down. I’ll be your friend no matter what happens, Emi.”

Anyone who could misunderstand the situation so badly hardly qualified as a friend.

“Still, don’t worry. My judgement will be fair.”

Rika smiled to put Suzuno at ease. What did she have in mind?

Suzuno had led Rika to a misunderstanding, and she squeezed the other woman’s hands.

Emi could not think of a way to rectify the situation.

“What are you two trying to do, pushing me to the side and saying whatever you want? I, I’m not going!”

Saying so, Emi used her last resort. However, Emi’s words meant completely different things to her Japanese colleague and the Ente Islan cleric.

“...Is that fine?”

“Is it permitted?”

A hurt look crept into Rika’s eyes. Suzuno’s own gaze seemed to ask if she could do as she pleased. It was a complete victory for Suzuno.

“~~~~~!”

She groaned in grudging acceptance of the facts.

“...Then, let’s prepare for the campaign. Of course, I’ll leave at the crucial moment, but since I stuck my nose into this, I need to take the appropriate responsibility. Therefore, I’m with the two of you.”

Saying so, she walked ahead of them.

After looking at her back, Emi glared at Suzuno with all her might. In response, a look of apology crept onto the typically stoic Suzuno’s face.

“I felt that you would not come along even if I suggested that we all go together.”

“What the hell!”

Emi hissed those words in dangerous tones so as not to let the person in front of them know of her displeasure.

“This is quite unusual. It seems the Demon King has become a supervisor who now rules over human beings, no?”

Speaking of which, he apparently said something about becoming an assistant store leader.

“Say what?!”

It was Friday evening, but the sun still shone brightly and the pedestrians all seemed restless. Therefore, Rika did not scold them for whispering.

“Your casual preparations for slaying the Demon King weigh heavily on my mind.”

Suzuno stared earnestly into Rika’s back as she walked ahead of

them.

“While he seems harmless in daily life, the Demon King is the Demon King, and I have no idea what will happen when he is given power over mankind. When I consider the potential tragedy which might unfold, I realise I cannot guarantee anybody’s safety by myself.”

What tragedy could Maou bring about during his control over MgRonald’s for a fixed period of time? To Emi, who knew of Maou’s work ethic, it seemed like an unfounded worry.

“I could not randomly cause disasters, and you denied my face to face request, Emi-dono. Therefore, I had to resort to this...”

“Ah, fine, whatever.”

Emi sighed in resignation.

She herself had once dreaded when Maou would show his true nature and bring down a disaster upon Japan.

However, while this might be completely different from what the Demon King did in the past, as long as the Demon King’s group did not act foolishly and did not pose a threat to Japan, she could even begin to accept their existence.

It disgusted her to defend Maou, but if Suzuno saw Maou’s work attitude, she would probably understand as well, to some extent.

“Next is the matter of the mysterious attacker. I am not just here to defeat the Demon King, but to sort things out and bring you safely back to Ente Isla. If we could work together, my doubts would disappear, and I might even be able to help you at a critical moment.”

Emi still could not forget her explanation, which blended a variety of proposals. Emi could only smile bitterly at the fact that she was still calmly trying to push this until now.

“Still, frankly speaking my biggest challenge is how to stop Rika

from running on.”

“What’s that about me–?”

Rika reacted to the sound of her name and turned back from where she was walking ahead of them.

“...No, it’s nothing. Just keep going. I want this over soon.”

“So determined~”

Nothing was scarier than kindness run rampant.

After stepping out of the Keio Line’s Hatagaya station, Rika planted her hands on her hips and scanned her surroundings.

“It’s all well and good that we reached Hatagaya... it feels like MgRonald’s has fewer people in it, and it’s not lively at all. It doesn’t look like a good place to settle things. If the store isn’t noisy, things will turn bad if people raise their voices. People control themselves differently depending whether or not others are around.”

Despite her cool analysis, there seemed to be a hint of anticipation for the “disgraceful state when self-control fails”. Or was Emi thinking too much about this?

“Even when a man is being reasonable, he might wreck his workplace... Business is booming at Sentucky Fried Chicken opposite, so maybe it would be best to hold council there instead.”

“Rika, you’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

All she could do was go with the flow. Of course, she could sneakily alter Rika’s memories from behind, but even if it was Rika’s fault, Emi was still afraid of doing something like that to a friend with her best interests at heart.

She took a look at MgRonald’s, and like Rika said, there were clearly too few customers. If they went in, Maou and Chiho would recognize them right away, and react appropriately.

“First, permit me ask this Maou person a question. That way, we might be able to settle this dispute.”

Things would result in a dispute as long as Maou was the Demon King and Emi was the Hero. How did Suzuno intend to avoid this?

Did she really intend to lie that she and Emi were fighting over Maou?

They pushed open the heavy double doors and entered the three-storey Hatagaya Station branch of Sentucky Fried Chicken. As Rika had said, it looked very busy, so Emi began to idly hope that they would not have to go in on account of the place being full.

“Welcome! Welcome to Sentucky! We have a table for four free, so if you wouldn’t mind stepping up to the counter...”

That hope vanished under the crew member’s care and attention.

“This way, please. Here is our menu...”

The three of them did not pay attention to the menu, so a certain male employee with a small frame and big sunglasses handed Suzuno and Emi a menu each.

Emi immediately took it up, but it did not seem any different from the stuff on the counter menu.

“I want an ice coffee. You guys?”

“I’ll have maple biscuits, the ice tea set, and the milk.”

“...Ice coffee.”

“Alright, I’ll pay for these afterwards. That’s all for us.”

After she said that to the male crewman, the small-framed employee was all smiles.

“Understood. Please wait a moment. If it pleases you, these are discount coupons in celebration of our opening. We hope you will make use of them. Just let me total up the bill...”

Rika immediately took up the coupons, and then she roughly

brandished a 1000 yen note.

“Rest assured, I will give this matter all my attention. Our products will surely be delighted to be consumed by fair ladies like yourself. Here is your change.”

“Alright... huh?”

Rika's attention was on the coupons when she stuck her hand out, so she did not pay attention when the crewman took her hand and placed the receipt and change on it. That drew a weird noise from Rika.

She could not help but stare at him, but he had already turned away to prepare a drink and he did not notice Rika's reaction.

“Ah, so he's the ‘please accept it with joy’ type?”

Rika did not think further on it, but continued studying the coupon. Soon:

“Ah, it is a sin to make ladies wait. Here is your order; please avail yourself of it.”

He had taken less than a minute to process her order. Rika nodded slowly and took the tray from him before meeting up with Emi and Suzuno under the stairs.

“That man was flirting with me and I had a hard time dealing with him. Also, he has terrible taste in cologne.”

“What?”

“Hm – it's nothing. Let's go to the second floor.”

Emi and Suzuno immediately went upstairs. Rika chose this moment to look at that man from afar, but he was blocked by a customer so she could not catch sight of him.

“Now then, let's start from the beginning of the matter. Maou Sadao-san, was it?”

As the crewman had said, there was a four-person booth open.

Emi and Suzuno took one side, while Rika leaned over from the other side with the serious face of a judge.

“I heard a little about him from Emi, but I think it’d be better if you two told me again.”

“Well, he is my next-door neighbour... and quite a good one at that.”

Emi glanced aside at Suzuno, who could say such things without blushing despite having declared her willingness to exterminate the Demon King.

“As for me, he’s someone I might want to kill right away.”

Emi did not say anything else, but obviously Rika could not take those words at face value.

“Well, that’s quite the difference of opinions – still, you’re not being honest at all, are you, Emi~”

Emi was prepared to speak the truth without hesitation, and she was surprisingly persistent on that front.

“Hey, Rika, I’ve already told you before, but there’s nothing between me and that Maou. I didn’t want to introduce him to you for other reasons, and we’re not fighting over Maou.”

“Ehhh? Didn’t you say ‘Maou belongs to me’ when you came over to my place?”

“I did not! Also, don’t take things out of context and string them together!”

Two months ago, on the night of the tunnel collapse incident, Emi had spent the night at Rika’s house. Emi had told Rika that Maou was “familiar, but hardly a friend”, and “she could not wait to finish him off with her bare hands”. She did not remember saying anything else.

“Why are you trying to pair up Maou and I in such a disgusting relationship? Just thinking about him makes me mad! He’s cruel,

cunning, wicked, clueless, poor, dumb, thoughtless enough to pick up a discarded umbrella and use it...”

Emi could cheerfully state Maou’s various sins all day long.

While part of her did not want to match up to Suzuno’s rhythm, the malice just kept flowing from her tongue like a roaring river.

“I can’t let that stand, Yusa!”

And then, it was interrupted by the voice of a third party.

Suzuno lifted her head in confusion and Rika turned around.

They saw a tall man who had just finished his meal, holding his tray and about to take a step. He was looking down on Emi’s table.

He was a resident of the Demon King’s Castle, a man who had until this morning been bedridden with stomach upset.

He was Ashiya Shirou.

“What are you doing here? And, where have you been all this time?!”

Emi reflexively pointed at him.

Ashiya glanced at a counter seat by way of explanation.

“When I discovered you lot had entered, I’d intended to leave quietly to avoid trouble! But just as I was about to do so, you began abusing my master! How useless would I be if I let such vicious slander stand?!”

Leaving quietly was proof of uselessness in itself, but it was quite impressive that he had not mentioned Maou’s name or called him Demon King-sama in his conversation with Emi.

Emi suddenly thought of a more productive way to engage Ashiya than arguing with him.

“Ah yes, Ashiya! This is a good chance for you to help me out. It concerns the reputations of yourself and Maou.”

“What?! Why must I help someone like...”

“You came here to investigate this shop, right? Order anything, it’s on me.”

“Well, I guess it can’t be helped, then.”

“Uwah!” Rika exclaimed. Somehow, this man who had been arguing with Emi not moments ago had somehow sat down beside her while she had kept her eyes on him.

Even Emi – who was the one planning to use Ashiya in the first place – was astounded by the speed of this change.

“...You’re unexpectedly evil...”

“That’s where you are wrong. Right now, my top priority is the household finances. I shall gladly endure any disgrace and get my hands dirty to avoid unnecessary expenditures.”

“It’s hardly cool to say that you’ll do dirty deeds for a cause like that.”

“Shut up. In any case, I need to investigate dessert and salad, but I lack the funds for it. Shall we have them next?” Ashiya said without any shame whatsoever.

“Ah, I’m not too sure about this, but are you two friends?”

“Like hell! As if!” Ashiya and Emi exclaimed in unison. Thanks to that, the people around them looked curiously at Emi’s group.

“I do not know who you are, but if you wish me to begin from my relation to these people, I am Kamazuki’s neighbor, Ashiya Shirou.”

“Ahh, pleased to meet you. I’m Emi’s colleague, Suzuki Rika. If you’re Suzuno’s neighbor, that means... are you a relative of Maou-san?”

“Ah, you could say that. Do you know the master of my household?”

Ashiya winked at Emi, as if to say, *Does she know about us like Chiho does?*

Emi shook her head weakly.

“Yes, and I’d like to know more about him, so I would like to ask you.”

Ashiya went on guard at Rika’s words.

Rika was a new face to Ashiya. Why did she want to know Maou, whom she had never seen or heard of before?

“Ah... Ashiya? I think your caution is unnecessary.”

Emi’s words did nothing to lower Ashiya’s alert level.

“Basically, Emi wants to keep other girls from approaching him.”

“Hah?!”

Ashiya raised an eyebrow, then looked at Emi with a puzzled expression on his face.

“Yusa, explain yourself.”

“...I’d like to know too.”

Ashiya’s eyes roved between Rika, Suzuno, and Emi. Finally:

“So, Yusa wants to keep other girls from approaching him, then.”

He repeated Rika’s words, as though sampling them.

“Concerning our reputations, huh. So that’s what it is. The cat’s out of the bag, Yusa.”

In that instant, the edge of Ashiya’s mouth curled up, and he smiled smugly at Emi while saying:

“I see. Now, where shall I start from...”

Ashiya put on a show of careful consideration—

“This is probably the first time you’ve heard of it, Kamazuki-san, but the truth is that Maou and I once ran an enterprise.”

—And proceeded to make no sense whatsoever.

“Ehhhhh? An, an enterprise?” Rika exclaimed in a strange tone.

“A-Ashiya! What nonsense is this?!”

Emi’s eyes went wide at this unexpected development.

“What, what is he saying?” Suzuno quietly asked Emi, but even Emi could not answer.

Ashiya believed that Suzuno herself did not truly understand the true identities of Maou and himself, so he was serious about enlightening Suzuno.

“How old is Maou-san?! Is he a teen entrepreneur?!”

“Indeed, he is.”

“Haah... this, the topic’s gone in an unexpected direction. What kind of enterprise was this?”

“Yes. We were largely concerned with land utilization and human resources, with side ventures in construction. We were... the Maou Corporation.”

Rika stared in surprise as Ashiya revealed an unexpected side to Maou.

In contrast, Emi and Suzuno muttered:

“...Human resources, what the hell...”

“Corporation does fit, though.”

Emi could not imagine what Ashiya was saying.

“But now... Well, I apologize for saying this to a fellow resident, but we went bust and now we live in a beat-up apartment as freeters. Maou, myself, and one other person have gathered together with the intention of burning this misery and using it as fuel to rebuild our enterprise. But what does all this have to do with Yusa?”

Here it comes, Emi thought as she quietly drew a breath. Please don’t be crude or anything...

She did not want to end up having to manipulate Rika’s – her

friend's memories.

Ashiya did not seem to accept Emi's plea at all as he continued:

"Yusa worked for one of our rivals back then."

"Eh? Emi, you used to be in construction?"

Rika's interest immediately turned to Emi. But before Emi could respond, Ashiya added:

"No, you were a temp back then, weren't you?"

"Temp... ahh, well, when you put it that way..."

In a sense, saying that the Hero was working on a temporary contract would be accurate. The Church Knights lived on donations, while the regular knights were paid by their lords. Unlike them, the Hero only received support when she was on her quest.

"Is that so... the Hero as a temp..."

"What did you just accept, huh?"

Emi jabbed Suzuno in the armpit to shut her up.

"We were a small enterprise in the land development business, small enough that we had to show up on site to personally direct operations. Backed by her skills and her company, Yusa frequently showed up to compete with us."

"When you say competition, you mean... since when do big companies give temps jobs?"

"Ah – well, ah, those would be connections, ah, on the board of directors..."

Emi smoothly covered up for being asked about her past in modern Japan, matching Ashiya's tragic tale.

"Ah – Emi's skilled with foreign languages, after all. What happened then?"

"Yusa had skilled companions and senpais, but we were all inexperienced rookies. Times were tight then, and once a big

company started stealing work from us, our budding enterprise started to collapse.”

“Ahhh... yes, I understand. The banks refused to grant loans, so regardless of how good things were on your side, your customers chose to import cheaper overseas products and orders dropped like a rock.”

Rika had only asked out of curiosity, but after hearing Ashiya’s story, Rika’s expression changed.

She had grown up near an industrial center in Kobe, so she was closely involved with the family in running business from a young age. Therefore, she had her own views on Ashiya’s words.

“And then, our final conflict pitted us against Yusa once more, and we lost the contract. As a result, our firm was forced to shut down. We drifted until we reached an apartment in Sasazuka, and about a year later we met Yusa again. Yusa remembered us from our final battle. I’m fairly sure she had her own opinions on it, which was why she came to check in on us every now and then. Am I wrong?”

“Ah – indeed...”

Rika seemed to agree and nodded vigorously.

However, Emi felt herself growing weaker and weaker by the moment. After all, Rika had accepted the words of praise for her which Ashiya had spoken.

She owed him an enormous debt. It was not something which a simple dessert and salad could settle.

“At the same time, Kamazuki-san moved in. Perhaps she was thinking of Kamazuki-san and did not want to allow our miserable lifestyle to infect her.”

“...Miserable lifestyle?”

This time, it was Suzuno’s turn to respond to Ashiya’s words. Ashiya nodded calmly.

Of course, Emi had no intention of doing so. At that time, she had merely wanted to keep Suzuno the ordinary girl away from the Demon King and his lackeys. She could not find anything convincing enough to overturn Ashiya's persuasion of Rika.

"Maou is young, and he does not have a university, trade school diploma, or any other tertiary education. A young man setting up his own business requires a lot of capital, knowledge and connections, but all three are very hard for us to come by. All we can do are low-end jobs below even Yusa's."

"...What are you saying, below even mine..." Yusa grumbled angrily.

"I think what Yusa wanted to tell Kamazuki-san was that she should not make risky gambles like ourselves, but find a stable job and work it... though it seems Kamazuki-san has taken the city air today."

Ashiya looked at Suzuno's hair, hair ornament, different yukata, her many purchases, and smiled.

"Ah, no, er, this is just part of acquiring social experience..."

Suzuno flushed despite herself and lowered her head. She did stand out on the commercialized streets of Japan, after all.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of. As a lady, getting to know the streets is excellent social experience for you."

After showing more understanding for the fairer sex than his master, Ashiya's face fell and he gave up on it..

"Maou has not given up on his dream to see his enterprise succeed. Right now, he is starting from the basics by working hard in McGonald's. Within a year, he has been promoted to shift manager. In any event, everyone is united behind Maou's goal to make himself great again, and I wish to help in any way I can."

Emi glanced aside to Suzuno, who was frowning. It was only natural for her to react that way when Ashiya declared that he

would not abandon his dream of world conquest in front of the Hero and a cleric.

“However, this is something like gambling one’s life. I can understand why Yusa-san would not want Kamazuki-san to get near us, given that she might get caught up in our affairs.”

“I am already involved.”

Cold sweat beaded on Emi as she heard Suzuno complain. Fortunately, nobody else seemed to have heard. Ashiya paused briefly before continuing: “Maou is a very stubborn man, or perhaps I should say that he takes things very seriously... Yusa was worried and came to check on us, but he took her as an enemy and disliked her from the start. So I think the situation you are imagining does not exist, Rika-san.”

If nobody else was looking, Emi would have stomped straight through the floorboards at this point.

Ashiya’s explanation was so convincing that she could not change their understanding of the situation. It was true that Emi was worried about Maou and gang, and that she did not want to get Suzuno embroiled in the whole mess.

However, Ashiya the demon had said so in a way that covered Emi in praise.

Emi was so embarrassed that she wished she could vanish, but Rika was quite impressed by this hidden tale of entrepreneurship and did not notice.

“Ah – so that’s how it is – to think someone of my age was already doing such things – it sounds really amazing – Sorry for butting in with my imagination running wild. Emi, you should have told me from the beginning.”

“...”

Emi thought, *would you have listened if I’d told you?* Her self-reproach for not expecting Ashiya to make up such a ridiculous

story intensified, but all she could do was remain silent.

“Well, our business failed and our boss works part-time in McDonald’s while I play househusband. Our third man is a jobless NEET. We’re hardly amazing.”

“Still...”

Rika’s awed expression changed, and she looked right at Ashiya with a serious expression on her face.

“If you say you’re just trying to keep yourself afloat, but living so lazily, then you’ve lost.”

“Lost... what do you mean?”

Ashiya could not quite parse Rika’s words, hence his question.

“I mean to say that the debts accompanying the collapse of a business are the smallest part of it. Even if you’re given a blank check, even if you’re bankrupt, the debt collectors will still come, no? I’m sure you’ll have a chance to get back on your feet once you reassess your situation and gather your strength.”

It was not a completely flawed assumption, but Ashiya was briefly stunned by this unexpected and sincere show of support.

“I came from a family which ran a small factory as a family business. Those were hard times. Everyone had to work. No matter how small something was, no matter how much or little it had to do with work, everyone pitched in to do their best. Maybe you did fail once, but Maou-san and that other person eat the meals you cooked, sleep on the blankets you dried and wear the shorts you washed. That’s the basic foundation for everyone else’s efforts, so I think you can take pride in that. Thanks to your mutual support of each other, I’m sure you will succeed later on.”

Rika carefully studied her words and conveyed them to Ashiya. He was surprised at first, but then her words seemed to slide in a place within his heart, and he gently nodded.

“Is that so... I see...”

Then, he looked at Rika with a refreshed look on his face.



“Thank you for telling me all that. You are the first person to ever do so.”

His smile looked gentle and happy. In the dying light of summer, a hint of pain appeared on his somewhat emaciated features.

The truth was he had not fully recovered from his illness, but for some reason, when she saw it, time seemed to stand still for a moment and Rika’s heartbeat picked up.

“Suzuki-san?”

Ashiya noticed Rika freezing up and called out to her. She came around, nervously waggling her hands.

“Ah... no – well, er, that’s how it is. Sorry about that. I was being a busybody.”

“Certainly not. In truth, there have been many things weighing heavily on my mind which I can’t tell others, but your encouragement has helped me recover my spirits.”

There seemed to be hints of seriousness in Ashiya’s tone. Being a househusband was hardly a role one would brag about.

When the Demon King declared his path to conquest would begin by working in a Japanese enterprise, Ashiya had wondered vaguely if continuing on their current path was acceptable.

Rika’s words seemed to provide a sense of direction to him that he could not get from anywhere else, and it resonated deeply within him.

But is it really alright for those words to speak so deeply to me, he did not ask.

“Is, is that so? Then, then that’s wonderful. Yes, wonderful.”

Rika took a mouthful of ice coffee, as though to swallow her raging feelings.

“Rika?”

Emi seemed unhappy at Rika's sudden change in attitude and called out to her.

“Ah! E-Emi! What, what happened?”

Rika was so nervous that she nearly dropped the cup she was holding.

“What happened? What's wrong with you? Why are you like that?”

“N-nothing! Nothing's wrong! Nothing happened! Nothing at all!”

“...You repeated yourself four times,” Suzuno dutifully supplied.

“Well, even so, yes – people have history...”

Rika seemed to be exaggerating when she said that, polishing off her coffee in one gulp.

“Personally, I'd like to see this Maou fellow.”

“Eh?” Emi exclaimed in an exaggerated tone.

“Anyone who could become a shift manager at a big chain store in MgRonald's in such a short time must be really amazing. He may have gone bust in the past, but, doesn't that mean he might end up doing big business in the future?”

“But how... even if he did get two raises of 100 yen an hour...”

When he recalled Maou's smile from back then, Ashiya felt the old chains on his heart. However, Rika was quite surprised.

“Ehhh?! 100 yen? That's awesome! Going from a trainee wage to a regular wage in two months is something else. MgRonald's doesn't tolerate incompetent crew members, right? Just let him soak up the culture a bit and he'll surely end up doing something amazing, don't you think?”

Indeed... if the circumstances are right...”

Ashiya had always thought of himself as a demon first and foremost, and he had made mistaken assumptions about Japan.

“Is that so. That means, right now...”

“Hang on, Rika!”

Emi could no longer remain silent, and cried out. However, Rika silenced Emi with a stern look.

“I don’t mean anything weird by it. I’m simply talking about an entrepreneur with a bright future. After all, I am the daughter of a company’s boss, and I feel that I have a keen sense for business.”

“I don’t quite get what you mean. What are you talking—”

“Connections and understanding one’s surroundings are critical to opening a small factory. If Maou-san is going to continue founding his enterprise, it would be good for him to begin making connections now. Many SMEs around the world are unexpectedly linked, after all. While I don’t know what sort of business Maou-san wants to run, and I doubt it has anything to do with my family business, I feel that having more connections and knowing about the market won’t hurt.”

“I’ve never heard that before. Rika, when you mentioned your family business...”

“We make shoes, mainly soles.”

What Maou wanted to do would involve changing the world. It seemed hardly possible if it was all talk.

“...It seems Rika-san is considering the possibility that Maou might end up ordering her family’s shoes as he slowly rises within the ranks of McDonald’s,” Ashiya added. “After all, if he ends up in Human Resources, he’ll probably place want to orders for cheap, durable, and sturdy dress shoes to go with uniforms.”

He said those, and other things.

“In the end I just ended up showing off. Don’t pay it any heed. Ashiya-san, you should go. You have information about the enemy to report, don’t you? You need to help the other side’s sales

somehow, right?”

“That was my intention from the beginning. Then...”

Ashiya suddenly turned a wicked, devilish grin on Emi.

“You’ll be coming along too, won’t you? Order their special cookies and thousand island salad to go. See you at McGonald’s.”

“You skinflint,” Emi muttered. However, if she did not do as he said, there was no telling how he would change his story.

“Kamazuki-san, thank you for your daily aid. This is on me, so please feel free to order anything you like.”

“Ah, no, I’ll go back and make...”

Ashiya’s attitude to Suzuno was completely different from how he treated Emi.

Emi’s head hurt more and more as she saw Rika smirk from behind Ashiya.

As they descended the stairs, they saw that business was so good that long queues were snaking everywhere.

“...I’ll go and buy your things first. You three wait outside.”

Saying so, Emi joined the queue by herself.

While she had cleared up Rika’s misunderstanding, Emi had run into another kind of trouble.

There was no telling where the calculative Ashiya would take this if she did not properly repay his kindness. For all she knew he might even cook up some cunning plot against her.

Emi agonized over how to clear her debt to Ashiya. She came to the conclusion that the only way was to kill him, just as she realized that she had reached the head of the line. Therefore, she began placing Ashiya’s order for him.

“Oh my, dear miss. The food won’t taste good if you put on a face like that.”

Emi raised her head at the greeting. There, she saw the crewman who had taken Rika's order earlier.

He was short and scrawny, and unlike the other employees, he wore a Y-necked shirt and a black apron.

Given his nametag read SARUE in kanji, he was probably a store leader. He wore a pair of huge sunglasses which were rare on sales personnel, but they did not suit him at all.

"Thank you. A special cookie and thousand island dressing, to go," Emi stated. She had other things to worry about, so she absently tossed out a 1000 yen bill onto the tray without further thought.

"Understood. There is a certain charm to the troubled faces of young ladies, after all."

Emi stared curiously at the crewman. Would making such comments about customers not result in complaints being filed against him?

"Still, whatever troubles ail you, time will change all things, whether you will it or not. Do not regret not acting as you see fit."

"...This is the first time someone from Sentucky has ever pried so deeply into my affairs."

Emi furrowed her brows in annoyance, but the crewman did not seem bothered by it as he neatly packed Emi's order and bowed to him.

"Forgive my prying, but please allow me to say those words."

That Sarue fellow seemed to be leaning forward in an exaggerated fashion to present Emi with her bag.

"Men take advantage of women when they're weak."

"...What do you mean?"

"Nothing, there is no special significance to it. Thank you and please come again. Next customer please! Over here!"

There was clearly some significance to it, Emi mused, and then a mother and son couple ran into her from behind.

“Ah!” exclaimed the boy, who had run into Emi.

“Ah, ara, I’m so sorry! Really, I told you not to run! Are you alright?”

The mother was cradling an infant and she was holding the hand of what looked like her elder son. She bowed to Emi in apology.

“Ah, no, it’s fine...”

There were more customers coming, so she could not speak further with the crewman. Also, Rika and the others were waiting outside, so she had no choice but to leave.

“...Allergies... prawns, crabs, and fruit...”

“I shall check right now, please wait a moment.”

She overheard their exchange.

“Spare me the troublesome stuff,” Emi muttered as she left the store.

She was in a bad mood and did not feel like looking back, so she did not turn around. But if she had, she would have seen the employee called Sarue looking at her.

“So, opening discount and gift vouchers... was there anything else?”

Ashiya presented Maou with the intelligence he had collected on the enemy.

“From what I can see, there are no major differences between their wares and those of McRonald’s. Their customer service attitude is also quite mundane,” Ashiya said as he flipped through the notes he had taken.

“As for anything of note, their trademark fried chicken is quite

good. Even the bones are delicious and edible, much to my surprise.”

“You... even the bones...”

Maou frowned for a moment, but Ashiya shook his head to stop him.

“According to Urushihara’s research, Sentucky’s fried chicken seems to be made with a unique method, like the grill house’s cartilage. Even the marrow tastes incredibly good. Of course, one does not need to eat it, but if you do, it greatly reduces the amount of waste left behind.”

Since this was the opinion of the househusband, Maou folded his arms in agreement.

“I see. While it might be somewhat unsightly to the surrounding people, if one does not wish to move, than the less rubbish left behind, the better. There’s no telling how much easier it makes tray-clearing.”

“Also, if the reports are to be trusted, their coffee is carefully grinded from organic coffee beans.”

“What is Ogre meat coffee, anyway?”

Ashiya flashed a fiendish glare at Maou for his misunderstanding.

“Organic. That is to say, organically-raised beans.”

“Still, even if ogres raise the beans, don’t they all end up as the same Blue Mountain coffee or whatnot?”

“That may be so, but it certainly sounds better when you phrase it like that. In truth, it is also quite a delicious coffee for the price.”

“Now is not the season for hot coffee, but it may become a long-term problem.”

Maou palmed his forehead, a troubled expression on his face. Ashiya took the opportunity to look around the store’s interior.

“Indeed, taken individually, each of them does not seem like a decisive difference.”

Today was Friday with its high sales targets, but the company inspectors had phoned in with Sentucky’s number of customers every hour. After comparing the differences between the number of their customers and those of Sentucky, they were behind by around 50 customers. That was roughly a difference of 30’000 yen worth of sales.

In addition, the number of customers coming in had been dropping since this morning. Ever since dinner hours started, only one other group of customers had come in since Ashiya.

“It is as you say. However, these are only the fruits of my observation for two hours. Future passers-by will only focus on new things...”

“If that’s the case, it’ll be a question of probability.”

Maou shrugged.

“Well, it’s not like I’ve been doing nothing but looking on in shame. We’ve been struggling too. Thank you.”

Ashiya had to fight to resist the impulse to genuflect before Maou in response to his praise.

“You honor me with your praise. Though my efforts are feeble, I pray you will allow me to contribute regardless. In homage to the sales receipts, I shall order two Big Mag set meals, with large sized drinks and beans for both. Urushihara will complain, but this shall be our dinner.”

“If he, as the delinquent of the Demon King’s Castle, complains about the food, I authorize you to beat him.”

“Understood.”

The order which his master, the Demon King, had given him filled him with vitality.

“Also,”

He glanced back to the tables and gave Maou a conspiratorial smile.

“Do look forward to them.”

“Ah? Ahhh, I don’t quite get it,” Maou replied as he nodded slowly and uncertainly.

“After this, I shall take a different route back. I shall also have Urushihara look behind the scenes, and we might be able to pick up on something we cannot detect from the outside.”

“I don’t think using the internet will yield anything. There are various small differences between each business, such as shopping, cooking, and other secrets. Learning them won’t do you any good. Besides, you’ve only just recovered. Don’t play around.”

“I hear and obey.”

Just as the two demons finished their back and forth, Chiho came from behind with Ashiya’s order. She packed them up and handed them to him.

“Thank you for the wait, Ashiya-san.”

“Not at all. I wish the two of you all the best.”

“Thank you. I will work my hardest,” Chiho was all smiles as she replied to him.

Maou watched Ashiya leave as he left the store with a big bag in hand. At the same time, he turned to address the other group of customers who were still in the store.

“Hmm – they’re pretty close. Is there a good reason for mixing professional and public life? Surely he hasn’t forgotten his dream of rebuilding his business? And they act so professional too. Emi, you’ve got a lot of competent people around you. Ah, do I count as one of them?”

“Say what you want.”

“...The chairs are harder than Kentucky...”

The three ladies did not order anything. They simply took their seats and chatted. Maou glanced at them, and then approached them with a stiff smile on his face.

“Ah – dear customers?”

“...What do you want?”

One of the trio glared at him in annoyance.

“Would you like to place your orders before taking a seat?”

“Ah – a small ice coffee, then. Bring it over here.”

It was the cheapest item on the menu. Since she was not under Ashiya’s eyes, Emi wanted to draw out her troublemaking. Maou’s temple twitched.

“Our store practices ordering at the counter and self-service, dear customer.”

“Then I’ll have an apple pie too. This is a rare experience, no? Bring it over here.”

Emi stubbornly refused to rise from her seat.

Maou struggled to maintain his professional demeanour, and turned to Rika, who was seated opposite Emi.

“Dear–”

“Ah – so you’re Maou-san, then. What is this, I can’t believe the person Ashiya-san is so loyal to could be so lacking in leadership and charisma. And the shop is empty on your watch.”

“–Customer, this might be sudden, but might I inquire as to who you are?”

This was their first encounter, but Maou had finally buckled and broke under her unexpected words.

“Oi – those are scripted lines, aren’t they? I’m going to complain to your company about your poor service–”

Rika laughed as she looked at Maou with an insufferable smugness.

“What the hell. Even if you’re a customer, I don’t need to slavishly obey the store rules all the time. Who are you, anyway?”

It was not hard to imagine that she was a friend of Emi’s. If that were the case, she would essentially be Maou’s enemy.

“I’m Emi’s colleague, Suzuki Rika. Maou Sadao-san, I’ve heard about you from Emi, Suzuno, and Ashiya-san.”

“...Ashiya and Suzuno are one thing, but I doubt she’s going to say anything good about me.”

“Ashiya-san’s and Emi’s opinions of you were very one-sided. I came here to make sure of it myself.”

“I don’t quite understand what you’re saying, but are you a busybody or something?”

Maou scratched his chin from beside the table, looking down on Emi, who was spacing out for some reason.

“Dammit, the customers don’t come but Emi does. This day just keeps getting better...”

“You can’t say that, Maou-san.”

Saying so, Chiho showed up with a tray.

“Chiho-dono, I see you are working hard,” Suzuno greeted her.

“Thank you, Suzuno-san.”

Chiho smiled to Suzuno, and then stood by Maou’s side, looking somewhat angry.

“Yusa-san is also an important customer. Anyone who orders from us and pays is a customer, is that wrong?”

With that, Chiho placed the tray on Emi’s table.

“Here, your ice coffee and apple pie are done.”

“Ah, Chiho!”

Perhaps she had heard Chiho announcing her order, but Emi hurriedly rose and took out her wallet.

“Sorry, I thought you were Maou and...”

“It’s fine, I understand. While I’m not usually allowed to do this before collecting the money, this isn’t a busy period yet. 300 yen, please.”

Emi was sincerely apologetic as she handed the coins to Chiho.

“Really. I can’t do anything against you, Chiho.”

“Of course. Treating you and Chiho the same way would be an insult to her.”

“Uwah – that was savage.”

Rika smiled bitterly as she heard his comment.

“Dear customer, are you a friend of Yusa-san’s?”

“Yes, I’m Emi’s colleague, Suzuki Rika.”

“My name is Sasaki Chiho. Yusa-san has been very kind to me.”

Chiho hurriedly executed a bow. Rika seemed to be thinking about something as she looked at Chiho’s face, then she waves Chiho over.

“Hm?”

“You’re Chiho, aren’t you?”

“Ah, yes.. uwah!”

Rika suddenly hugged Chiho.

“You’re so cute! What’s with this girl, she’s so cute! Eh? Ehh? You’re a miracle of modern Japan!”

“Uwah, uwah, uwah~”

Chiho ended up flailing her arms around in response to Rika’s sudden movements.

“Emi, you’ve got so many amazing people around you! She’s polite, principled, and cute! It’s against the rules! She’s a protected species! She should be covered by the Washington Convention |8|!”

“Su-Su-Suzuki-san?”

“Please wait, Chiho must be quite worried.”

“But she’s so cute like that too!”

“You’re not a drunken dad, Rika!”

“Ah, yes, I’m sorry, Chiho. Onee-chan got a little excited.”

“Uu... ah, ys... I don’t quite understand, but...”

After being released, Chiho’s eyes went round and round in confusion.

“So, did you find a good job?” Maou said to the hitherto-silent Suzuno. Meanwhile Chiho glanced at Rika, who had toyed with her.

Suzuno was surprised at someone addressing her, and hesitated. Then:

“No, not yet...” came the short answer.

“I see. Still, just enjoying the streets isn’t very good, you know.”

The way she carried a balloon while wearing a yukata was just like a fair-goer.

“This is part of my so-social studies!”

Now it was Suzuno’s turn to red-facedly stammer out an answer.

“Social studies, huh? I see. We couldn’t do it since we were drifters from the start, but you should plan your expenditures better. You’ll go broke if you keep buying these things.”

Saying so, Maou looked back at Emi.

“She hasn’t found a job yet, so don’t infect her with your buy-everything OL spirit.”

He looked depressed.

It hit Emi like a bolt from the blue. Suzuno would never tell Maou about her true identity given her circumstances, so why was it that she – who was being used due to extenuating circumstances – had to do so? She grumbled about the matter in her heart.

“From Ashiya’s tone, it sounds like something’s bothering you?”

“Yeah, something big. Just don’t interfere with her peaceful life and there won’t be any problems.”

Emi glared at Maou and Suzuno, her words meaning two different things. Maou shrugged and smiled bitterly.

“Like I said, I don’t know how troublesome it’ll become.”

Then, he said something very meaningful.

“Wait, what do you mean by–”

Emi had a bad feeling about those words, but before she could speak, Rika drowned out her voice.

“Yes, what are you going to do about this store? Doesn’t look lively at all, no? Emi’s surrounded by geniuses, so I doubt you’re as dumb as you look...”

“So you’re saying I look dumb, then... There’s no reason to let a customer who isn’t even from Management worry about this.”

“It’s because of another company, right?” Rika said with no shame whatsoever.

“I think I said it just now, but I’d like to see the way you work.”

“I don’t know why, but who are you, anyway?”

“Emi’s friend, Suzuno’s friend, and the boss’s daughter?”

“You’re making less and less sense! If you don’t want to eat, then go! I don’t have time to stare at you lot.”

“You told Ashiya-san that this was your final struggle, was it not? What are you preparing to do?”

“You really don’t listen, do you?” Maou sighed unhappily.

Just then, a third party's voice came from the door.

“Maou, you there?”

An old man carrying something big and green stepped into the store. Rika, Suzuno, and even the exhausted Emi turned to see what was going on.

“Nabe-san! You came all this way!”

“Well, you requested it, Maou. I felt it would be best to come as soon as possible.”

The old man called Nabe-san laughed heartily.

“I should have gone to get you. I'm very sorry for that. Could you put it against that wall over there?”

“Ohhh, that's right, I didn't bring a very big one to the store.”

Nabe-san tapped his forehead and then leaned the big green thing against the wall outside the store.

“The small ones are around the same size as children's eyes, and the leaves will get pulled off in one day. They're the best since you can use them immediately. So I prettied them up for you. Now that I've brought what I came here to send, I'll be going back.”

“Eh? Going back already? I'll treat you, order anything you want.”

Maou was trying to keep Nabe-san from leaving, but Nabe-san shook his head.

“Kami's made dinner for me already, but I understand. See you during the next sweep, and help me say hi to Kisaki.”

Nabe-san waved, and then swiftly strode off, his footsteps firm and steady.

Then, as though they had planned it all along, several McGonald's employees who had been empty-handed before showed up with their hands full of multicolored paper-like objects.

“Awesome, you got something so flashy!”

“Let’s decorate it before the dinner peak hours.”

“There’s traffic cones without tips in the storeroom. If you run the bamboo through the head and hold it in place with tape, you could use it for decoration.”

They gathered one by one, giving their suggestions.

“Hey, what’s that boring-looking thing over there?”

Maou heard Rika speak, and after handing the item Nabe-san had brought for them, he returned to Rika’s table.

“What else could it be but bamboo?”

“Bamboo?”

“It’s going to be the Sasahata 7th Month Festival, you know.”

As Chiho said that, she took out clipped pieces of colored paper and an oil-based marker from her uniform pocket.

“Sasahata... Tanabata?”

Emi seemed confused, so Chiho decided to explain.

“On a certain day, Sasazuka and Hatagaya come together and organize a festival named after the first word of each district’s name – Sasahata. It might be a little old-fashioned, but aren’t bamboo leaves symbolic?”

“I begged the store leader to gain permission from the district office to offer a special service for this. If an elementary-schooler writes a wish on a paper slip and hangs it up, they get a free small drink.”

“The real Tanabata is next weekend, so Maou-san came up with this to steal a march on Sentucky.”

Chiho puffed up her chest in pride.

“Hmmm, you did all that?” Rika asked, a hint of awe in her voice.

“We have plastic bamboo decorations every year, but it’s not as famous as Christmas.”

“We made the decorations under Maou-san’s instructions. They’re very pretty.”

The colorful paper strips aside, there were also swallow-tailed flags, paper cranes, fishnets, all of which were handmade decorative items. Rika examined what Chiho was holding.

“Hmm, these are pretty. But isn’t fresh bamboo expensive? The point is to cut costs, right? Did you pay for them?”

Maou puffed up his chest at Rika’s realistic question.

“Hehe, you think so? However, this comes from my connections as an assistant store leader. The gramps from just now is called Nabe-san. I got to know him during the district’s volunteer cleaning drive. He has a lot of bamboo plants in his yard.”

“You’re... a volunteer district cleaner?”

“Volunteering means working for free. Did you do that sort of thing too, Sadao-dono?”

“Aye, I do participate in community activities.”

The shock on Emi and Suzuno’s faces was different from that on Rika’s face.

“There was a sweep yesterday morning, so when I asked him he was quite happy to help. Normally, I would have gone to him to take it – that wasn’t very good of me. He comes by the store every now and then with his grandchildren.”

Emi finally understood why Maou had left the house early yesterday. While she had been spared severe injury because of that, the fact that the Demon King was showing off his life as a model citizen left an indescribable feeling in her heart.

“Also, you can’t keep fresh bamboo until next year, so I felt it would be best to cut them down on the day of the festival, and make it feel like a mini-Tanabata instead, maybe give them to the kids as a present.”

“Hmmm? What’s this, will that make modern kids happy?”

Maou replied to Rika’s question with a wag of the finger.

“The kids love writing on the prayer strips. It’s the adults who feel that kids are only interested in games. Tanabata decorations and Christmas decorations each have their own meaning, and they look good if they’re put up properly. And since they’re bamboo shoots, you can use them as store decorations. The decorations themselves are made of paper, so when they wither or you’re sick of them, you can burn them as flammable rubbish.”

In the Shibuya district, small quantities of fresh wood could be cut into pieces smaller than 30 centimeters and disposed of as flammable garbage.

“Granted, we don’t know how good they’ll be at attracting customers. But given the season, it ought to be better at engaging the customers and local population than just throwing some decorations together.”

“Hmmm, you’ve put a lot of thought into this.”

Rika was quite impressed after listening to Maou’s words. She looked between Maou and the bamboo, and then back at Emi.

“He’s pretty competent, isn’t he?” she said, not bothering to disguise her praise of him.

“Oi, heard that, Emi? Your friend is saying I’m qualified to be a store leader.”

Maou smugly looked down on Emi after being praised thusly.

“Like I said, doing this is a waste.”

Chiho smiled bitterly, and then explained it in a way that Maou could easily understand.

As she looked at Maou – whom she hated from the bottom of her heart – Emi frowned and replied, “... I admit that you’re pretty eager about your work.”

At long last, she managed to squeeze those words out.

Emi did not want to approve of Maou to his face, but Rika, who did not know what Emi was thinking, nodded in satisfaction.

Just then, an employee holding two large plastic objects in his hand came in.

“Maou-san! We still have a few more broken traffic cones. We also have these, the anti-parking poles. They’re very stable when you fill their legs with water, so having them press down the traffic cones would make them more stable.

“Thank you! Marvellous, this is great! Now, all that’s left is to decide the location!”

Maou took the traffic cones and poles from him and dashed out of the store as Emi watched his back. She could not read any evil intent from the way Maou had gleefully decorated the store sign with Tanabata decorations and worked hard alongside his fellow crew members.

From every angle, he looked like an acting store leader whom all his people looked up to.

“Yusa-san, are you alright? Are you unwell?”

Chiho noticed Emi’s complicated feelings and called out to her. Emi smiled weakly and replied:

After saying that, she looked back to Maou’s back.

Chiho looked like she still wanted to speak, but another crew member called Chiho from behind the counter: “Are you pushing yourself too hard? Maou-san will scold you for that.”

Until the end, she was still concerned about Emi. Emi shifted her eyes from Maou and fell into through as she watched Chiho go through the maintenance checklist on several machines.

The original store leader, the woman called Kisaki, had made the atmosphere in this store. However, the fact that Maou had taken

over in such unfavourable conditions and still managed to keep spirits up could not be omitted.

Chiho (who had feelings for Maou) and the rest of the crew, seemed quite happy as they threw themselves into their tasks. They accepted Maou's suggestions on how to work with the Tanabata bamboo, even though it had nothing to do with their official duties.

The Demon King Satan was a foe she had to vanquish. But Emi looked at Maou's back as he experimented over and over to keep the decorative bamboo stable, and she muttered to herself.

“But will he really be good even if I'm not here...”

She did not want to acknowledge that. She could not acknowledge that.

A criminal might repent of his sins and do good, but his sins would never vanish.

She looked to the side and saw Suzuno staring sternly at Maou's back.

Emi had the feeling that she was still plotting something even after seeing the atmosphere within the store.

Just then, when Maou's experiments finally managed to keep the bamboo stable—

“Eh?”

The strange noise from Rika made Emi look over to her.

“Rika, what's wrong?”

“It feels like the customers are all charging here...”

Rika stared dumbly outside. Emi's gaze was also drawn in that direction. Was it her, or was the flow of humanity that had been heading towards Sentucky Fried Chicken dissolving, with a huge mass of people converging on McGonald's?

Maou had just finished setting the bamboo outright when he saw

all this.

“Oi oi oi!”

A surprised smile came to his face, and he hurriedly returned.

“They’re coming! They’re coming! All hands to battlestations! This is not a drill! They’re coming!”

Before anyone could tell if Maou’s instructions had reached everyone, the flow of customers reached MgRonalds’ and the automatic doors stayed open.

The population in the store soared in an instant, and the interior became heated and lively.

“Ehhhh? Seriously? Did setting up the bamboo do all that? What kind of Feng Shui is this?!”

Rika could not help but laugh.

“What on earth is going on?”

Emi wanted to laugh, but she could not.

“...”

Suzuno stared hard at Maou, and then at the decorated bamboo shoots outside.

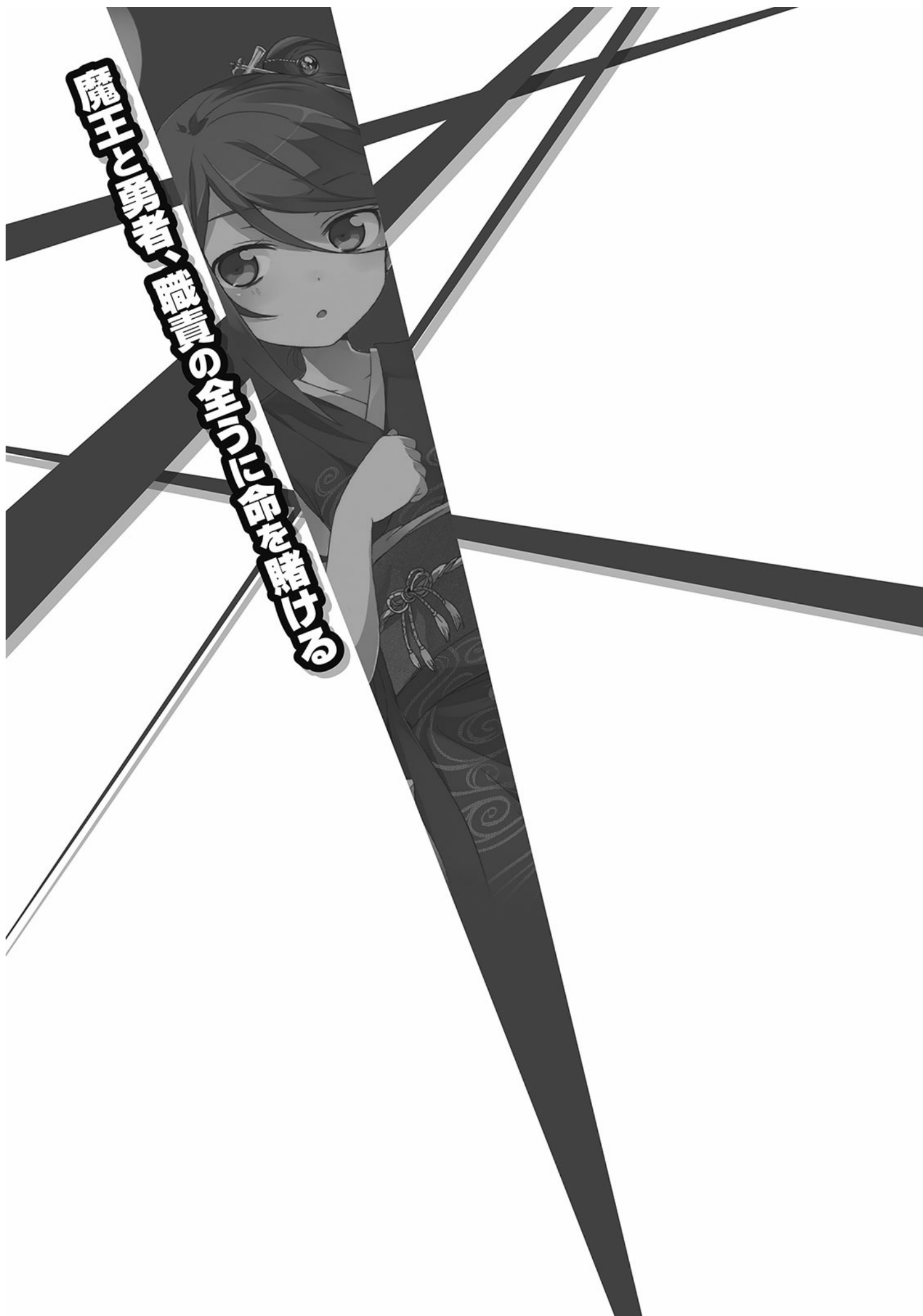
“Welcome! Once you’ve decided what you want to order, please join the line in front of the counter!”

Maou’s lively voice echoed throughout the store as he welcomed customer after customer.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEMON KING AND THE HERO RISK THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

魔王と勇者、職責の全いに命を賭ける。



The people on top had it easy, while she ended up having to judge and settle the problems caused by her colleagues.

They handed them all to her – formerly of the Inquisition, now the top woman of the Doctrinal Correction Council.

It was true that she was close to the the Diplomatic Ministry and its leader, Olba Meyer.

However, if a superior was held responsible for his subordinates' actions, it would be unacceptable for the Church – which was supposed to glorify righteous faith – to palm everything off onto their subordinates and wash their hands of the matter.

They revived Archbishop Robertio where he had fainted.

『As the Doctrinal Correction Council, you will pass judgement in a way that minimizes damage to the Church's dignity.』

This was the order.

It was always the same.

They did not take control themselves, but they were afraid of being hurt and shamed. They did not dirty their hands with work, but took peace for granted and enjoyed its fruits.

Once, the Western Continent was completely disorganized before the onslaught of Lucifer's Army.

The Church Knights and the Allied Knights of various kingdoms disagreed on who should have command.

The kingdoms wished to weaken the power of the Church in the Western Continent, which the Church opposed.

Both sides ignored their dire straits and struggled for the right to slay the Demon King. Conflicts between man and his fellow man were quite common. Naturally, the Demon Army did not miss this opportunity and attacked them. Nobody on the Western Continent could muster any effective resistance against Lucifer's army, and they were forced to give up half their territory.

Faced with the danger of human extinction, the Western Continent continued its infighting, wasting lives pointlessly.

At that time, she – as the Chief Executor of the Inquisition – had been ordered by her direct superior, Olba Meyer, to begin a purge in order to break the current deadlock.

On the Western Continent, where the Holy Church was ubiquitous, being labelled a “heretic” was a social death sentence.

She made full use of the theological and legal knowledge she had learned in the Diplomatic Ministry, and conducted inquisitions on those unforgivable people who incited political infighting and lowered morale of the frontline troops.

One could say that her days were full of blood until the Hero Emilia showed up and comprehensively defeated Lucifer.

Struggles between the various kingdoms and the Church continued to break out. No matter how carefully she searched, she could not stop the flow of fools – both secular and clerical – who did not understand the risk to humanity as a whole.

She was a human, but she hunted other humans in the name of justice, even resorting to illegal means and assassination. Their favored weapon was the cross of the Holy Church.

The fact was that as long as she had a cross on her person, she could use the holy art “Armaments of Light” to convert holy magic into a weapon. She had used it to assassinate many people.

Thanks to her and her people, the efforts of the Inquisition’s Executors accomplished the sacred task of bringing peace to the world.

The situation began to change when the largest kingdom on the Western Continent, St. Aire’s Empire, was threatened, and their important leaders were captured by Lucifer’s army.

St. Aire’s was the strongest nation on the Western Continent, and once they were in peril, there were no other huge organizations that

stood in the way of the Holy Church. Fearing the wrath of the Inquisition, the remaining kingdoms gradually agreed to form an allied army led by the Holy Church.

At the same time, once the star of the Hero Emilia began to rise, their “sacred duty” ceased to exist.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of Emilia and her companions against the Demon Army, the disparate nations abandoned their mutual animosity like it had never been and united as one.

Humans could resist demons. This was the work of Emilia, who showed mankind the simple light of hope.

However, when the news of Emilia’s heroic sacrifice during the slaying of the Demon King spread throughout the world, the nations which should have united under the light of the Hero fell apart in an instant.

After the Demon King was destroyed, the Inquisition itself faced censure by the nations of the world for their cruel actions.

In order to avoid these accusations, the Church disbanded the Inquisition, and set up the Doctrinal Correction Council in its place, a laughable farce designed to provide “open religious trials”.

She could not accept that.

She felt that if the people of the Western Continent had been willing to unite from the start against the Demon King, there would be no need for sacrifice. How many of those who had sentences passed on them would have survived?

Without the Inquisition, the Western Continent would have been destroyed before Emilia could take center stage.

“Even we do not pass judgement recklessly!”

But her voice did not reach anyone.

The Holy Church maintained their share of political power thanks to their concessions to the various nations, but those from the

Inquisition like herself felt like they had lost their pride and their faith.

And now, the new myth of “the Hero Emilia who gave her life for the peace of the world” dazzled the world. The Holy Church and the various nations innocently glossed over their pasts.

The world slowly returned to how it had been before the Demon King had showed up.

Was this the world Emilia had bet her life to protect?

It should not have been this way.

What all those sacrifices had bought was stasis for the old world. This could not be a good outcome.

Thanks to her deeds in the darkness, she was appointed as the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council.

If that was how it had to be, then she would make its ideals come true.

It would not be a peace to indulge the ugly desires of a bunch of old men, but a peace that illuminated the lives of the lost with the light of hope.

“I shall correct the doctrines.”

She opened the Gate and stepped through to another world.

Crestia Bell.

This was the name of the cleric feared as the “Grim Reaper Death Scythe C. Bell”, who had used cruel purges and ruthless judgement to exterminate countless heretics, but who also longed for peace.

“Then, I’ll be making a move first.”

It was 9pm, and Chiho bowed to Maou after she had finished changing.

“Oh, thanks for your hard work and the bento. I’ll return the box

to you tomorrow after I wash it.”

“Ma-Maou-san, you’re being too loud!”

However, Chiho was even louder. Fortunately, none of the other crew members seemed to have noticed their dialogue.

“Still, I’m relieved. Not only did we hit our target for dinner customers, but we even made up for the customers we lost during lunchtime. That’s great.”

Maou and Chiho recalled Kisasi’s Arctic blizzard of a smile and shuddered in unison.

“I don’t want to go to Greenland.”

“I can never tell if Kisasi-san is being serious.”

The two of them looked at each other, dried-out smiles on their faces.

“Then, be careful and get home quickly.”

“Yes. Ah, I’m very sorry about taking your bike this morning.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Ah, hey, Emi!”

Maou shifted his eyes from Chiho and turned to Emi and Suzuno, who were some distance away.

“Talk some other time. If you stay there, seat turnaround will go down. At the very least, send Chi-chan home,” he carelessly said.

“It’s not like I mind, but I did order something. You don’t have the right to complain about me,” Emi frowned as she replied.

While she was not under Ashiya’s eyes, she had to avoid being indebted to even more demons. The two of them had spent 2000 yen on their MgRonald’s receipts, which was a pretty good take.

Rika had left before the peak hour, saying, “I feel relieved after seeing Maou-san.” While she had been the prime agitator here, Emi breathed a sigh of relief that she had not been forced to alter her friend’s memories.

She had been prepared to leave with Rika, but Suzuno had said, “I would like to stay and watch Sadao-dono work, if it pleases you.” Maou, who was proud of his work as store leader, gladly agreed.

While she had no idea what had made Suzuno say such a thing, Emi could not go back alone lest she end up doing something dangerous.

In the end, they had stayed until Chiho’s shift was over. Emi prodded Suzuno, and she finally agreed to get up from her seat.

“...You’d better tell Ashiya that I’ve paid off the debt.”

“Who cares? You *do* know that racking up the debt was your fault in the first place, right?” Maou answered coldly before shooing Emi away.

“The past is the past, now get lost. And walk *Chi-chan* home safely, *please*.”

Maou emphasised “Chi-chan” for some reason, but Emi could not figure out why.

“I’d do that even if you didn’t tell me. Let’s go, Chiho.”

“Ah. yes. Then, see you again, Maou-san. Thank you for all your help.”

Chiho was already used to Maou and Emi talking in corners, so she did not find it suspicious. Instead, she quickly caught up with Emi.

Suzuno was staring from the distance and did not approach the counter.

“...Pardon my intrusion,” she quietly said. Then she bowed to Maou and left the store with Emi and Chiho.

“Thanks for the visit~ Please come again~”

After Maou watched them leave, he put on his professional smile again and delivered the usual greetings.

“Chiho-chan, where’s your home?” Emi asked.

Chiho looked towards Sasazuka and replied, “There, next to Koushuu Boulevard. It’s in the opposite direction from Maou-san’s apartment. Can you really send me all the way there?”

“It’s fine. Besides, I’ll be going in the same direction to take a train from Sasazuka. It’s along the way, that’s all. This isn’t because he asked me, but it is nighttime, and it’s not quite right to let a girl go back by herself.”

“I see... but aren’t you a girl yourself, Yusa-san?”

“I’m special. Then, let’s go.”

Suzuno followed Emi and Chiho to Koushuu Boulevard. There were many cars there, but traffic was quite light for the nighttime, and they added another shade of lighting to the evening.

There were few pedestrians, and the light from the shops was unexpectedly dim.

The sidewalks of Koushuu Boulevard ran alongside the Capital Expressway, like a tunnel running through the mountain that was the city.

They stopped at a red light at the Sasazuka intersection with the Hatagaya Skybridge. Then:

“Ahhh – but it’s good that we got a lot of customers,” Chiho said to herself as she stretched.

“Wouldn’t it have been okay if it was like that since this morning?”

“That was probably my most relaxed day ever since I started working.”

“Hmm... still, Rika was really surprised. It really *was* a sudden change.”

Indeed, the veritable flood of customers that had poured into MgRonald’s had heated the interior up almost immediately.

Maou's plan of complimentary dreams for wishes had an immediate effect. The bamboos had filled up with prayer strips during Chiho's shift.

"So Feng Shui is real. I don't believe much in fortunes and the like, but I can't help but think of it after seeing this."

After Chiho said that, the light turned green. Yet, Chiho was stopped in her tracks by Suzuno's words.

"...Did you really think that was just a coincidence?" Suzuno muttered.

"Eh?"

Chiho turned to look at Suzuno as she heard her.

"Ah, speaking of which, what do you think of working with us, Suzuno-san?" Chiho said lightly, in an attempt to change the topic.

"Did you not notice, Emilia?"

Suzuno ignored her, and spoke Emi's name. She spoke *Emilia's* name.

"...Eh?"

"Emilia...?"

Chiho covered her mouth in surprise. Suzuno glared at Chiho and kept an eye on Emi.

"I had my suspicions, but it would seem you know about the Demon King Satan, Chiho-dono."

Suzuno turned a razor-sharp look on Emi.

"Emilia. I know you have your plans. You wish to finish off the Demon King at your own pace. But after seeing 'Maou Sadao' at work, I have come to the conclusion that he must be slain promptly."

"Eh?! Su-Su-Suzuno-san?!"

Chiho leaned forward in a panic, but Emi stopped her.

“What does that mean? I was quite clear about what I saw.”

“Have neither of you considered why he pretends to be a kind Japanese citizen who acts thoroughly unlike a Demon Lord?”

Suzuno grit her teeth, speaking like a priest reciting holy scripture.

“Have neither of you considered that he could actually rise through the ranks in Japan, become a Demon King who is loved by all, until he is powerful enough to influence society itself?”

Suzuno spread her arms wide.

“Have neither of you considered what will happen when he reveals his true nature and betrays this world?”

“Nope,” Emi replied without any hesitation whatsoever.

“I’ve told you what it means to be promoted in MgRonald’s, right? It’s a big company, but even if he went mad and destroyed their headquarters, the world would not change much. While it’s a huge enterprise and it might cause big changes in global share prices, saying he could destroy the world is a little too...”

“There are people in this country who wound up being politicians that could change the world, despite only having an elementary or technical school education. Do you really think the Demon King’s ambitions are limited only to MgRonald’s?”

“Ah, you’re talking about Tanaka Kakuei, aren’t you?”

Chiho went “Yes, yes!” and raised her hand eagerly, but it did not have any effect on the grim mood in the air.

“It is more likely that he is using the difference between the cruel and immoral Demon King Satan of Ente Isla and the young man who works hard at MgRonald’s to deceive everyone around him. Demons are long-lived, and we do not know what schemes he has in mind. Therefore we must slay him *right now*. It is no longer just a matter of Ente Isla’s safety, but that of Japan and Earth.”

“No, you can’t! Maou-san’s working hard as shift manager!”

Chiho sensed that Suzuno was serious about wanting to slay Maou, as a person from Ente Isla. She tried to speak in his defense, but Suzuno walked past Emi and glared angrily at Chiho.

“Also, I think leaving her memories behind will be problematic too. If word of the Demon King’s survival gets out, there will surely be glory seekers – unlike Emilia – who will openly visit Japan in order to slay him. Do you think they will understand the trouble they will cause Japan? Or will they instead use Chiho-dono and the people around him to harm yourself and the Demon King? Before that happens, we should eliminate the memories of all the humans linked to the Demon King and personally finish him off.”

“No! You can’t! You mustn’t!”

The traffic light had changed several times during Suzuno’s long spiel, and it turned yellow before illuminating her body with the color of blood.

“Chiho-dono, do you understand the significance of the Tanabata decorations?”

“...Eh?”

Suzuno suddenly changed the topic. Chiho stared dumbly, and Emi frowned.

“The five colors of the prayer strips represent the five colors controlling the flow of energy throughout the world. It is said that the spirits of the ancestors reside in bamboo leaves, and their long branches can exorcise evil. However, decorations in modern Tanabata celebrations do not possess such power. Yet, when the Demon King finished his decorations, the customers started pouring in. What does that imply?”

“...He summoned the customers with the decorations?”

Suzuno nodded severely at Emi’s response.

“They say that bamboo, which concentrates the power of the earth, combined with the Tanabata decorations, which crystallize the wishes of mankind, can protect against evil. The Demon King used that as a field within which he worked his demonic magic. That seems like the most natural explanation.”

“That’s pretty good considering you were once alarmed by a flat-screen TV.”

“It is the duty of the mission ministry to research local religious customs for future proselytization.”

After casually ignoring Emi’s jab at her, Suzuno approached Chiho and Emi. Backing up would mean stepping onto the road, so the two of them were forced into proximity with Suzuno, “Can you accept that? This is no longer simply Ente Isla’s problem. If we do not make haste, there is no telling when he will harm McGonald’s or even this country. Many lives will be lost for nothing if we do not take action immediately.”

Suzuno glared at Emi.

“You were attacked by an unknown third party. I am not just here to protect the world’s peace, but to bring you back to Ente Isla. It is a painful decision, but you were never meant to be here in the first place. I will eliminate Chiho-dono’s memories and remove all traces of Ente Isla from Japan.”

The night was hot, so Emi was sweating heavily as she stared back at Suzuno.

What Suzuno said made a lot of sense. Perhaps the Hero Emilia from a year ago would have agreed with her assessment without any hesitation whatsoever.

However, there were presently great doubts in Emi’s heart. Surprisingly enough, Suzuno’s words had solved the question about why she had not been able to finish off the Demon King now that her power had returned.

However, before she could explain, a trembling voice interrupted her.

“...No.”

It was Chiho.

“Don’t... don’t do it... I don’t want to forget...”

“Chiho...”

“I don’t want to forget anything. I don’t want to forget Maou-san, Yusa-san, Ashiya-san, Suzuno-san, even Urushihara-san...”

Chiho frantically shook her head.

“It took so long for us to become friends, and we had so many good times together! Isn’t it too much to make me forget all that just because it’s convenient for Ente Isla?!”

“...I will not apologize for that. However, it is for your safety, Chiho-dono.”

Suzuno lowered her head in apology, but Chiho would not accept it. Tears leaked from the corners of her eyes and Chiho practically screamed her next words at Suzuno.

“I don’t want to forget Maou-san, no matter what!!!”

However, Suzuno infused her determination into her pain-filled expression, and her words grew more and more forceful as she spoke them in a voice like iron.

“Chiho-dono, the Demon King Satan will make use of these feelings of yours. No, it is only natural that he makes use of them. Your feelings for him are but a plan to sap our fighting spirit and delay our extermination of him...”

Emi would also have agreed with this in the past, but now it was completely out of the question.

Naturally, Chiho could not accept that.

“It won’t be like that! Maou-san isn’t like that! Why do you have to

say such awful things! He's kind and he works hard, so why do you have to say things like that?!"

Chiho was usually a mature individual, but she let her emotions burst forth now.

"...He is the Demon King. He let demons run wild on Ente Isla to commit cruel and wicked acts. He is the King of all Demonkind who made countless people suffer."

Suzuno's words were starting to grow harsher now that she saw Chiho was not listening to her.

No human being from Ente Isla would be able to dispute that account of the Demon King.

However, Chiho did not back down.

Instead, she said something that did not take mankind into account at all; not even Emi, who was watching the proceedings in silence.

"Have you seen the Demon King Satan before he became Maou Sadao, Suzuno-san?!"

The air turned silent for a moment.

Emi and Suzuno were having trouble figuring out what Chiho was saying.

"...Ah, what do you mean?"

Neither of them knew what Chiho was trying to say, so they had to ask for clarification.

Chiho looked at Suzuno with teary eyes and continued:

"Everyone says Maou-san is Demon King this and Demon King that, but why would such a mighty Demon King use his power to fix the Capital Expressway and wipe away everyone's frightened memories?! With such power, wouldn't it be easy to take control of the Prime Minister or the American President and conquer the world? Why didn't he do that?!"

This time, it was Suzuno's turn to be speechless.

“...I did not personally see the incident Olba Meyer instigated, but he must have done so for some reason. I do not know what deeper intentions the Demon King...”

“What other reason is there besides the fact that he's a kind person who lives his life correctly?! Isn't it right to apologize when you cause problems for people? Maou-san was only doing what was right!”

“...”

“Maou-san taught me about work. He paid close attention to me, he got mad when I messed up, and he discussed a lot of things with me when I was still immature. Even after becoming the Demon King Satan, he kept his promise to teach me how to use the soft-serve machine! If someone like that led an army of demons to conquer the world, there has to be a reason for it!”

“So you're telling me that we should let this be water under the bridge and forget it?!”

Suzuno had exploded as well.

“How many lives do you think the Demon Army took in Ente Isla?! Do you think those people would accept the news that the Demon King turned over a new leaf, just like that?! You live in a peaceful country and never had to fear for your life! You have *no right* to say that to we who hunt the Demon King!”

But Chiho did not back down.

“All you did was fight the Demon Army! You never met the Demon King himself! What do *you* know?!”

“...What—”

Suzuno stared dumbly at Chiho's face.

“Even when Maou-san became the Demon King Satan, I knew he was a good person! Isn't it true that the great Church of Ente Isla

was also trying to kill Yusa-san?!”

This was the impression Chiho had of the humans from Ente Isla, another world.

“Yusa-san, even you didn’t meet the Demon King before entering his Castle, did you? How can you know everything the Demon King did just from the fact that he let his demons run wild?!”

“...Chiho-dono, I am sure you will become an excellent barrister someday. I can guarantee that as Chief Executor of the Inquisition. You are very adept with words.”

“Suzuno-san! Don’t avoid the question! Please answer me!”

“The commander must take responsibility for his subordinates’ actions. It is only to be expected! How can the slaughter of humans be excused just because it was his minions doing it?!”

“Calm down, the two of you. Arguing here won’t accomplish anything.”

“But!”

“Still!”

Both of them shouted as they looked to Emi.

“Suzuno... no, Crestia Bell. Frankly speaking, I feel that what you’re saying is right. However, just hear me out.”

Saying so, Emi gently pulled Chiho, whose face was a mess of tears, into her embrace.

“Yusa... san...”

“The peace I wanted was one where everyone could smile together. I did not fight for a peace where sacrifices have to be made and where I have to ignore my friends’ tears.”

Suzuno’s head shot up like she had been flicked in the forehead, and she could not speak for a moment.

“I only want to slay the Demon King when it ends in smiles all

around. Not involving the Japanese was always arrogance on the part of Ente Isla. We have our opinions about the Demon King, but so does she. We should not decide matters on her behalf.”

“...Are you serious about that?” Suzuno asked Emi in a trembling voice.

“Oh yes, very serious,” Emi replied in an unwavering tone.

“Ridiculous. Are you waiting for the approval of Japan and Ente Isla before you slay the Demon King? That’s impossible! There are sacrifices that *must* be made!”

But as she said that, Suzuno’s eyes lost their shine and her words lost their strength.

It hurts. Why does it feel like I’m stabbing myself in the chest with my own words?

Had she not come here because she wanted to get rid of that term “sacrifices that must be made”? Did she not want to change the world which ignored those sacrifices and the reasons for making them?

“Even so, I have to do this. This is because I am the Hero Emilia, the hope of mankind.”

Suzuno knew Emilia would say that. She understood, but Suzuno still said the same old things which buried her in darkness.

Emi relaxed a little, as though she were speaking directly to Suzuno’s heart, before continuing:

“Also, on a more practical level, if we stick our noses into this and cause the Demon King, Alciel, and Lucifer to awaken at the same time, things will be very bad for just the two of us. Judging by the fighting style and abilities of the mysterious third party, I can conclude that they don’t belong to the Demon King’s group. Even if we drop everything to slay the Demon King, we’ll end up fighting a battle on two fronts where we lack fighting strength and information. It’ll be very disadvantageous for us. Therefore—”

Emi put her hands on Chiho's shoulders.

“Right here, right now, I just want to protect Chiho's smile. I will not allow you to erase her memories. If you insist on doing so, then you'll have to go through me first.”

Saying so, Emi raised her hand before her chest.

“The holy sword... are you serious...”

Her right hand glowed, and the raw heavenly silver of the holy sword reacted with Emi's holy magic.

Even with the tiny amount of power Emi was putting out, she managed to shine brilliantly amidst the sparsely-populated lights of the shopping districts and the traffic lights.

“You are one of the people of Ente Isla that I must defend. But if you lay a hand on Chiho in the name of some lofty cause, then I will fight you for the sake of Chiho's memories and her desire to not lose them. After all, she is also a friend that I must protect.”

“Yusa-san...” Chiho said in a voice heavy with emotion.

“You came to Japan because even you dislike burying inconvenient things in the darkness. Am I wrong?”

“...”

Suzuno stared resolutely at Emi, but her resolve seemed brief and brittle, as though it would shatter upon the slightest shock.

“If you only cared about saving face for the Church, then you would have covered up Olba's wrongdoings and ignored them. If I were someone like that, I would have pretended the Demon King was already dead. After all, by claiming that the Hero – who came from the Church Knights – defeated the Demon King at the cost of her own life, the Church could turn her into a legend and use her to draw up a scenario for a perfect post-war world.”

Suzuno lowered her head and grit her teeth once more. That was because this was exactly the kind of script the aged Archbishops

had in mind.

“However, you, as one of Olba’s people, did not think that was a good thing. Is that why you’re so insistent on bringing me back? To declare Olba’s villainy and the dark secrets of the Church and trigger a reformation? Making them clean up their act so they can become a true pillar of faith in a peaceful world? That’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Emi stepped away from Chiho, walking slowly towards Suzuno, who had her eyes downcast.

“But you’re the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council, of the mission ministry that declares the righteousness of the Church.”

Emi reached her hands out to touch Suzuno’s shoulders. However, Suzuno twisted her shoulders away and stumbled back clumsily.

“Wait! It’s dangerous!”

However, Suzuno ignored the red traffic light and leapt into the intersection. She also ignored the loud blasts of vehicle horns, vanishing into the night with her many shopping bags.

She felt that she was being regarded in the same way as those ugly old men she so despised.

Suzuno had been forced to acknowledge that she was no different from them.

She had not protected the people she should have protected. She had declared that sacrifices were necessary. Not only did she gloss over them, but even claimed that this was a true peace. She was one of those wicked people who held power.

The sounds of cars braking abruptly reminded her of the cries of the “heretics” she had been purging up till now.

Emi sweated heavily as she watched the dangerous way in which Suzuno was running.

“I’m sorry. I said too much,” Chiho apologized from behind her as she wiped away her tears.

“I, I just heard things, and I don’t know anything about Ente Isla at all, but because of Maou-san... I said... such horrible things to Suzuno-san...”

Emi’s heart was a complex blend of emotions as she gently stroked Chiho’s head while the latter cried.

“It’s fine. It’s not wrong to like someone.”

“When you put it like that, it feels pretty bad... huh.”

Emi gently hugged Chiho, who seemed to be trying to swallow her sobs.

“...Yusa-san...”

“Still, she must have her own crosses to bear. You need to know that.”

“Yes... uuu. I need to apologize after this...”

“We’ll have a proper discussion some other time. She’s not completely deaf to reason.”

“...Yes.”

Chiho used some strength as she embraced Emi.

“Yusa-san, you feel like my big sister.”

“I’m hardly old enough for that,” Emi smirked before gently stroking Chiho’s hair.

“Still, we ought to be getting a little worried around now,” Emi muttered as she wiped the smile off her face.

While she had eventually forced Suzuno to a revelation about herself, Emi had no idea if Suzuno’s doubts about Maou had been truly erased.

Also, while it had nothing to do with Suzuno, the perverted scythe-user who seemed to have a grudge against Emi was still out there.

That one was clearly aiming for Emi, so they were probably an assassin from a different faction, one who had inherited Olba's will.

In any case, it would be bad to make too many open moves if she did not know what pitfalls awaited her.

As Emi thought about that, she sighed in annoyance.

Would she need to tell Maou and the others about Suzuno's true identity and the perverted scythe-wielder in order to protect herself and her ability to slay the Demon King?

She was worried that Maou's people would be unhappy to learn this. But at the same time, given they were almost out of demonic magic, perhaps they would behave themselves if they knew they had a high-ranking cleric of indeterminate power from the Holy Church as a neighbor. In that sense, it did not seem like a bad thing.

Or rather, she could not do it if she did not think of things in that sense.

"It can't be helped... it feels like I'm helping him out. I hate that feeling..."

"Yusa-san, I'd be happy if you and Maou-san could patch things up between the two of you."

Chiho seemed to have gotten carried away and blurted it out in an attempt to lighten the mood.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot compromise on that point even if a friend asks me to do so."

Emi could not let that slide, even if Chiho was only saying so on the spur of the moment.

"Still, if you want to let Maou-san know, then you should do it as soon as possible. Just send Maou-san's phone a message and he'll reply once his work is done."

Chiho took out her cell phone from her bag, which was some distance from Emi.

“Still, when did you realize that Suzuno-san was...” Chiho asked as she looked through her phone’s contacts for Maou’s number.

“Well, it was after breakfast this morning. She suddenly announced herself at Sasazuka station, so...”

Emi stopped here.

“Sorry, Chiho-chan!” she heard Suzuno scream.

Chiho froze. Emi grabbed her and ran to the side, and then the sound of an explosion followed.

“Eh? Whawhawhat?!”

Chiho had no idea why Emi was pressing her to the ground.

“...We’ll get hurt if we stand around to chat. Looks like we’ve got an annoying stalker interested in us,” Emi muttered resentfully.

Said stalker was Suzuno or Urushihara’s height, wearing a vinyl poncho, camouflage pants and a black hat which only exposed their eyes. Since there were no stains from the paintball, they must have changed their outfit.

A pair of slender hands wielded a massive scythe which resembled tonight’s crescent moon.

“Yu-Yu-Yusa-san, this person...”

“Yes.”

Emi kept Chiho behind herself, and carefully took a fighting stance.

“The assassin from Ente Isla who crashed into the automatic door at Eifuku-cho’s convenience store and got tagged by the shopkeeper with paintballs before running away.”

“...”

Chiho looked between Emi and the scythe assassin.

“Is, is he really an assassin?”

“Somehow I doubt regular Japanese people would be swinging such things around and falling out of the sky.”

“...That, that’s true...”

“You did this the last time as well, but what the hell are you thinking, attacking me in front of so many people?!”

Emi and the others had been arguing at the intersection, but there was a difference between a simple argument and the clash of blades.

The streets looked deserted at a glance, but if they fought in the middle of the road, someone would report it within minutes. Emi had learned this two months ago through personal experience.

When she thought about how her attacker had casually drawn in the people around them, she realised that protecting herself, Chiho, and the surrounding bystanders depended on whether or not she could quickly beat him back.

“I can’t waste too much time here. Time to get a little rough.”

Emi concentrated her thoughts on her right hand, forging the heavenly silver with holy magic, and the Evolving Holy Sword - Single Wing (Better Half) appeared, its blade glowing with a blinding intensity as she channelled her holy magic into it. If she could do that once or twice, she ought to be able to disperse those purple beams.

As expected, the eyes showing through the holes in the hat glowed with violet light.

Emi saw the paths of the beams and twisted aside. They missed Emi by a hair’s breath, then struck the crash barrier at the intersection before vanishing.

Emi and Chiho looked at the barrier in the same instant, and saw that it had not been harmed.

Since it did not cause physical damage, she was sure that all it

could do was disrupt holy magic.

“Celestial Greaves!”

She manifested and focused her exorcising raiment on her legs, then closed in on the masked scythe-wielder with a speed the eye could not see. Since she had no time to let Chiho escape, she would have to make sure he could not make a move on her.

Also, the enemy used a scythe, which was larger than the holy sword. Therefore, she had to settle the fight in close-quarters combat.

The sounds and sparks of metal clashing against metal sprayed through the intersection at night. All Chiho could see were blurs of movement and collision, over and over again.

Her holy sword was fully suffused with holy magic in order to deal with the purple beams, which was possible thanks to the Holy Vitamin β . The scythe wielder could only bear the lightning-fast blitz of the Hero and her sword.

However, no matter how hard she swung, her foe did not seem to be hurt. Instead...

“I’m... being overpowered...”

Her exorcising raiment was active on her legs, but thanks to their back and forth struggle, she was slowly losing ground against her opposition. Unable to bear the weight of the scythe-user’s strikes, Emi was steadily pressed back.

“You, what are...”

Before she knew it, the battle had gone from a back and forth deadlock to the scythe wielder crushing Emi from above. Suddenly, she heard a voice: “I told you, didn’t I? Men take advantage of women when they’re weak!”

“You are!”

Emi’s eyes widened as she heard the voice coming from the mask

that pressed in ever closer.

“Ggh... Celestial Flying Edge!”

The blade of Emi’s sword shone with white light.

This move was originally meant to be used when leaping over one’s foe and striking them down from above. At such close range, she might be affected by the shockwave as well.

However, she had no other choice in escaping this situation. She steeled herself for death as she made her move, and then the purple light shone again.

“We can’t have that now. Girls shouldn’t use moves that hurt themselves.”

As he dropped that casual line, the shining edge struck the purple beams. Then—

“What?!”

This time, Emi exclaimed in shock. The move she was about to unleash had been negated, and even the holy magic she had infused into the holy sword was rapidly weakening.

Emi grunted unconsciously as she sensed her opposition’s power growing rapidly.

“This is my power, the Wicked Light of the Fallen. This skill which overpowers any user of holy magic is unique to me.”

“Fallen! Could it be, you’re...!”

“As you have no doubt realised, I have come to free you from the burden of your mission. Now, go to sleep.”

With those gentle words, the purple light gathered in his eyes once more.

“Return the holy sword to me.”

“What...!”

In this moment, Emi’s line of sight was dominated by another flare

of light.

“Yusa-san!”

Chiho’s warning was a moment too late.

A massive, gold-colored mass blindsided Emi, the impact blowing her away from where she was being crushed under her opponent’s strength.

“Gaaaahh!”

Having overextended herself in an attempt to hold off her first opponent, Emi was caught unawares by the mighty blow which had come from another direction. She flew through the air, the wind knocked out of her.

Emi flew like a cannonball to where Chiho stood, frozen by fear. She slammed against a building and passed out.

The holy sword fell from Emi’s fingers.

The perverted scythe-wielder followed it with his eyes, but—

“!”

The metallic-looking holy sword fell to the ground like a feather, losing its form and reverting to motes of light.

The glowing particles that had once been the holy sword hovered around their unconscious user like a cloud of fireflies. Emi’s body glowed softly, and then it vanished.

Seeing this, the perverted scythe-user clicked his tongue quietly.

“Yusa-san! *Yusa-san!!*”

Elsewhere, Chiho shook the unconscious Emi in a panic.

She had passed out face down, but Chiho’s slender hands could not move her relaxed body. Chiho glared angrily at the third party, who was glowing with the same golden light as Emi.

“Why?! Why did you have to do something horrible like that?!” Chiho shouted.

“Suzuno-san! Why?!”

She looked at Kamazuki Suzuno, who held a gigantic golden mallet and whose hair flowed free to her waist now that she had unclipped her hair ornament.

“As I thought, you’re the same as them, Suzuno-san! You’re just trying to hurt Yusa-san like Olba-san!”

“...”

Suzuno looked down on Chiho, her expression filled with pain.

“I don’t, I don’t want this! You say Maou-san’s a demon, but if you betray Yusa-san who fought for everyone, then what are *you*, Suzuno-san?!”

“Shut up!” Suzuno shouted as she forcefully closed her eyes, as though she could no longer bear to hear Chiho castigate her. Chiho froze up as Suzuno approached in an instant and placed a finger on her forehead.

“Maou...san... help... me...”

And then her consciousness fell into the abyss.

A pink cell phone fell from Chiho’s fingers with a hollow clatter.

“Oh, a police car.”

Maou heard the sounds of sirens as emergency vehicle sped by on Koushuu Boulevard. The night was getting dark and after checking the receipts, he found that while they had managed to lure the flow of customers back to themselves, they had taken grave losses in the daytime, which meant that they might not be able to recoup the shortfall in receipts.

Even if sending him to Greenland was a joke, Kisaki might well be serious about docking Maou’s hourly wage, so all he could do was hope they could make up for it from tomorrow onwards.

The bamboo decorations seemed effective. The number of families which had come were higher. In an unexpected turn of events, it was not just children, but lovers and young ladies who showed interest in the decorations.

Thanks to that, the bamboo shoots were festooned with colorful prayer strips.

The decorations Maou had the crew members make were inspired by knowledge gained from research into Earth's magical history.

He had made extensive investigations into religions, magic, ki, spirits, and the like, so in truth they had only been completed after a tremendous amount of work.

Apparently, Maou had learned how to make Tanabata decorations from a nearby kindergarten teacher, but that had pleased him. After all, the origami he was learning was the same thing they taught in classes, and he was only too happy to have the assistance of a professional.

Maou decided to visit Watanabe-san's home to get a new bamboo plant. As he idly mused about what he would do tomorrow and thought about what instructions he would give the crew before preparing to close up—His phone rang.

That was not Maou's phone, but the store phone.

Maou was puzzled as he looked at the time on the clock. However, he picked up the handset before thinking of anything. This was the result of his adherence to the employee manual's instruction to not let a caller wait more than three rings of the phone.

"Thank you for calling, this is Maou of the MgRonald's branch at Hatagaya Station."

『Ara, hello? Oh dear, what should we do?』

The caller seemed to be a middle-aged lady, and judging by how she sounded, she was clearly in distress.

『Is that the shift manager, assistant store leader Maou-san?』

Who the hell are you and how did you know my full position, Maou wondered. Of course, actually saying that would lead to him being fired for poor attitude, so he kept quiet.

“Yes, I am Maou and I am in charge for the time being... may I know who is calling?”

『Ara, my apologies. I didn't expect you to pick up the phone in person, Maou-san, fufufu~』

Don't laugh, just state your name and tell me what's going on, Maou thought.

『I am Sasaki Chiho's mother. Thank you for taking care of our daughter.』

“Eh...”

Her words and his brief groan made his back straighten up like it was spring-loaded.

“No-not at all, Chi... ah, Sasaki-san's mother! The same, the same, thank you for your concern.”

Though she was not here, he bowed swiftly, almost hitting the drink machine in front of him.

There was no need to panic, this was just a call from the guardians of one of his crew members.

In addition, he was not intimately involved with Chiho. Well, they were close, but it was not a romantic relationship. However, thinking back, the handmade food Chiho had given him must surely have been approved by both her parents. That being the case, how should he treat Chiho's mother, and what should he call her?

His body broke out in a cold sweat, and the trembling in his voice box seemed to carry over the phone line.

『I do apologize for the great inconvenience our Chiho gave you. We were quite surprised by how she rode a bicycle back home, one

we had never seen before.』

Chiho's mother laughed, as though she were enjoying this.

“Ah, well, ah, that's hardly a bother... Chiho-san is an excellent member of our crew, and, ah, while it shames me to admit this, our table was quite frugal before this, and we greatly appreciate how she helped contribute to our spread this morning. Thank you very much!”

『It's not that Chiho doesn't help out at home, but she's never cooked before. If her food is undercooked or tastes strange, please tell her, alright? I've taught her what I could, but once I asked to help, she blushed and told me no, so I guessed she wanted to make sure you liked it.』

“Ha, Haa. I do apologize for that, although it was very delicious.”

『Ara, don't worry, don't worry. I'm sorry if I'm putting pressure on you. It's not like I'm insisting that you go out with her or anything, but she's always been a daddy's girl and hasn't really had a good relationship with boys before. Still, this is the first time I've seen her try this hard, so I'm quite happy for her as a mother. Ah, sorry for telling you all this while you're at work... 』

“No, ah, my apologies.”

That was all Maou could offer in response. While he had not done anything bad, he still could not stop himself from shuddering all over.

『Is Chiho still working over there?』

“Eh?”

Maou looked at the clock. It was just past ten. It had been over an hour since Chiho, Emi and Suzuno had gone home.

“Is she not back yet?”

『She said she would be buying some milk on the way back, but she hasn't come back yet. So I thought she was hanging around at work

after her shift ended.』

Maou felt cold sweat beading on his scalp.

He had never been to Chiho's house before, but it should not have been that far away.

She also seemed to get along with Emi and she looked like she was close to Suzuno, so where could those three girls have wandered to?

No, Maou thought as he dismissed those peaceful thoughts.

Alarm bells had been going off in Maou's head ever since Suzuno had moved in.

He had felt that she would not start trouble over small things as long as Emi was around, but apparently that hope had been too naive.

Really, what a useless Hero.

“Mother–” Maou began.

『Ara, dear me. Having my daughter's friend – especially a young man – call me ‘mother’ is quite the experience.』

What are you so happy about, Maou was tempted to retort. That temptation lasted one second, during which time Maou calmed his breathing and exhaled his desire to say it.

“Please rest well at home until your daughter returns.”

Those words were simple sound, but they converted into an electronic signal that reached Chiho's mother's ears.

And then, Chiho's mother fell silent and hung up without another word, as though everything which had happened up till now was a lie.

Maou was certain that his hypnosis had paid off.

After hanging up on his side, one of the crew members came up to talk to him.

“What's wrong? Is Chi-chan not home yet?”

“It looks like it, but she probably took a detour.”

“Ahhh, I think she was with friends.”

After these questions, the crew member seemed satisfied. He took his alcohol disinfectant and cloth before heading into the kitchen.

Maou ducked into the employee break room. He took out his phone from safekeeping, then clicked his tongue when he saw there had been a call an hour ago.

It was from Chiho.

The phone had been ringing up till its limit of 99 seconds. Maou had not signed on for a plan which offered useless things such as voice mail, and the phone's in-built call log had not received any messages.

Chiho was the sort of girl who was considerate enough to use text messages or speak to them in person the day after if someone did not pick up their phone.

Clearly, something was wrong given that she had kept the phone ringing until the time limit.

I should call back first, Maou thought, but 30 seconds later he was connected to her voice mailbox. He tried another two or three times, with the same result.

Maou was very uneasy. This time, he called Emi, who should have gone back with her.

He made several attempts, but he ended up speaking to the voice mailbox for each one. Maou clicked his tongue and hung up.

“Dammit!”

Chiho and even Emi were not answering. His bad feeling was getting worse and worse.

Hopefully Emi was just ignoring Maou's calls.

“Maou-san? Er. Maou-san?”

The crew member from just now had entered the break room to look for Maou. He was holding the shop phone handset.

“A call for you, Maou-san.”

“Is it Chi-chan?!”

He reflexively responded with more force than he intended, and the employee shrank back while shaking his head.

“Ah, no, it’s, it’s someone called Urushihara.”

“Hah?!” Maou exclaimed. He had not expected that name to come up now, of all times.

“...Hello?”

『Ah, Maou? It’s me~』

As expected, he heard the voice of the fallen angel Urushihara, who was currently a parasite in the Demon King’s Castle.

“Why are you calling the store phone! And, where the hell are you calling from?”

He had given strict instructions to Urushihara not to step outside, and there were no public phones near the Demon King’s Castle. That being the case, how had Urushihara made this call?

『It’s not like you’d answer your cell at work, right? I’m calling from home, what’s wrong with that?』

“From *home*?! When did you get a cell phone! Are you *that* rich?!”

『I’m not using a phone, and I don’t have the money for one. I’m using Skyphone¹. Skyphone. Heard of it?』

“What’s that?”

“It’s basically a way to make calls over the internet. It’s very cheap and recently they upgraded the service so you can even call landlines. Cell phones and their high cost-to-performance ratio are a thing of the past.”

Maou dearly wanted to ask what exactly a NEET who had lived in

Japan knew about trends, but instead he replied: “Forget it. You can do anything you want so long as it doesn’t affect the household finances. Still, what use is it?”

『Hah? What kind of attitude is that? Ashiya-san asked me and I found out about Sentucky after a lot of doing.』

If Maou had his way, he would have replied , “I should be asking about your attitude.”

Chiho called an hour ago, which meant that an argument might have broken out before that.

Maou started to get worried, and he decided that Urushihara’s call had lower priority.

“Ahhh, I see. Sorry, but I’m pretty busy on my side too. I’ll listen to you when I get back.”

Urushihara was loud enough to drown out Maou as he announced he was going to hang up.

『Hang on! Do you really want to do that? Sentucky – well, they’re complicated.』

“Ah?”

Maou heard the clicking of a computer mouse over the handset. It was surprisingly clear.

『The store leader’s name is Sarue Mitsuki and he’s running the Hatagaya Station branch, right?』

“Ahhh, seems to be, yes.”

『According to their employee register, that Sarue-san is 180cm tall and played rugby in school. Did you get that feeling from him?』

“...He did?” Maou reflexively asked. “Are you sure? He’s a midget around your height, and rather than a rugby player, he looks like the sort of guy who sleazily propositions girls in karaoke bars.”

『Are you calling me a midget?! ...Anyway, after reading through

Sentucky's Shibuya manpower allocation tables, he's the only manager-type there with a rare name like Sarue.』

“You... what on earth were you reading?”

『Also, the real Sarue looks like he was from advertising and publicity. The person registered as the Hatagaya Station store leader is someone called Tanaka... and she's a *woman*.』

“Eh...?”

If Maou had not discovered anything, this represented a gross inadequacy in the opposition's human resources management.

However, was it really alright to ignore Sarue Mitsuki, Kentucky's Hatagaya Station store leader, now that the documentation surrounding him had become very fishy?

Also, there was the fact that Chiho had not returned home yet, and Emi was not taking calls. The two of them went home together...

“I want to ask. Do you have a way to find where a person is through their cell phone?”

『Why are you asking all of a sudden? Anyway, I think there should be one.』

“Do you have one or not?!”

The words escaped Maou's mouth just like that.

『I don't have one right now. Things like that need a lot of time for analysis and I don't even know if this crappy computer can even do it...』

“Well, sorry for the crappy computer *that I provided!*”

What kind of attitude was that to take about something that someone else bought for you?

『Still, what's the matter? Who do you want to know about?』

“You should know who I'm looking for...”

『Emilia's location? Yeah, I roughly know where she is』

Maou paused mid-breath.

“Ahhhh?!”

“I know where she is. That’s because I snuck a course-tracking GPS transmitter into her handbag.”

“Course... Gee Pee Ess... what’s that?!”

Maou was stunned into silence at that high-speed string of words.

『Ah... forget it. Just think of it as something like those tiny transmitters in movies. They’re used to monitor the movements and whereabouts of animals and migratory birds. You can learn how long they spent moving and in which direction and so on.』

“You... something like this... when did you...”

『This morning. Be careful. Incidentally, I planted it in the bottom cushion of her handbag so it wouldn’t get exposed right away.』

That answer made Maou realise that Urushihara was the one who had tidied up the items that had poured out of Emi’s bag when she had taken a fall from the staircase.

『Maou, you know that Suzuno’s not Japanese either, right?』
Urushihara said casually.

『I kept quiet because you, as the man of the house, didn’t say anything. There’s no reason for a girl who isn’t particularly poor to move in beside us, after all.』

“...You’re surprisingly perceptive.”

“I don’t know if Emilia made contact with her after finding out. Still, the landlady isn’t human either, right? Any human being who’d sign a contract with her and move in beside the Demon King’s Castle is hardly going to be a normal person.”

When Suzuno had moved in, Maou had not been concerned about the new tenant’s morals, personality, or neighborliness.

Did the person who had signed a contract with *that* landlady hail

from Ente Isla? That was his sole concern.

“So the rice and udon that you and Suzuno made was...”

『I used to be an angel, so holy magic doesn't really harm me. It does make it really tasty, though. Still, are you alright, Maou?』

So that was why Ashiya had fallen victim to stomach upsets. It had all started with the food Suzuno had brought to the Demon King's Castle.

There were special rites on Earth and Ente Isla which could consecrate food.

Examples of consecrated food on Earth included wine and unleavened bread, and they played a special part in certain ceremonies.

On Ente Isla, consecrated food was grown on church grounds. There, the ingredients were raised on blessed soil and given holy water, all of which infused them with holy magic.

The ingredients Suzuno had brought had all been consecrated on Ente Isla.

Given the way she had sincerely tried to feed Maou and the others all that stuff, it was quite easy to see how she was an assassin who was trying to kill the Demon King in a way that was different from Emi.

Indeed, low-level demons would be hurt by digesting consecrated food, but—

“Well, the more damaging it is, the less tasteless it is, am I wrong?”

『Is that the only problem you have?』

Maou's nonchalant answer left Urushihara speechless.

Since eating consecrated food was equivalent to drawing upon holy magic for nutrition, high-level demons would eventually be hurt after extended periods of consumption. However, it was little more than food that was high in trans fats and bad cholesterol to a

human being, so they would not suddenly lose their power or become weakened.

Ashiya had ended up in that state because the battle two months ago had nearly bottomed him out on demonic magic, and because it simply did not suit his tastes.

“Well, she’s not the type to attack us directly like Olba. I don’t believe in resenting food, and she was helping out with our expenses, so I mainly thought of how to make best use of her.”

『But doesn’t that mean you’ll end up like that movie where that guy ate hamburgers every day? 』

“You know, Ashiya really likes to use lines from that movie. He used them on me a lot in the past,” Maou smiled bitterly.

“Anyway, how’s Ashiya now?”

Ashiya would surely not keep quiet once he found out that his neighbor was an enemy.

“He had udon when he came back and he’s groaning in the toilet now.”

“Ah, I see.”

Maou was almost in tears as he imagined the tragic state of his minion.

『Ashiya also sensed something fishy about Suzuno. Still, you didn’t say anything and it was helping with the expenses, so he kept quiet.』

“...His reliability and loyalty pleases me, but is he really willing to harm himself to cut costs?”

『Isn’t he? Anyway, I installed the transmitters because of this. It would have been one thing if it succeeded, but Emilia didn’t make any suspicious moves at all, so I stopped tracking her halfway.』

“I see. I get it now. Can you find where she is using the tracker?”

After some keystrokes and mouse-clicking—

『What's this?』 Urushihara exclaimed in surprise.

“What's what?”

『She went straight through a building from the intersection at our place and McDonald's. Looks like an airborne travel path.』

“Where's she headed?”

Urushihara simply replied:

『Tokyo City Hall. The GPS signal's holding still in the Tokyo City Hall Office Block 1.』

“...I see. Thanks, that's all I needed to know. Thank you, you were actually useful for once.”

『You can leave out the “for once” part.』

Maou nodded, and then he suddenly thought of something.

“By the way, how much did this horse-cracking GPS whatever cost?”

In that moment, the sound of water flowing and the broken toilet door opening came through the headset. Ashiya had come out of the bathroom.

『Not horse-cracking, course-tracking... Well, Ashiya came out, so I don't want to say...』

“It's fine. I'll talk to him after this. Tell me.”

Lucifer still hesitated.

『I got it from a vendor site in Akihabara... so around 4-40,000... using your card. 』

In that instant, the sound of something falling came through the phone.

Maou could practically imagine Ashiya fainting after hearing Urushihara had used household funds for his own purposes.

“Ah – well, it doesn’t matter. I don’t know what Ashiya will say and I didn’t know why you bought it, but I’ll let it slide because it ended up being useful this time round.”

『That’s great. It would be even better if you could come back and tell that to Ashiya *right now*. He’s being really scary.』

“I can’t. Work’s not over yet. Still, you helped me out a lot. See you around.”

『Ah, wait, Maou...』

Maou hung up, ignoring the howl of despair that welled up from the depth of Urushihara’s soul.

“Besides, the two of you are practically out of mana. It’d be problematic if you tagged along and got hurt. Superiors need to be sure of their subordinates’ conditions too.”

As Maou mumbled that to himself, he took a deep breath, as though intoxicated by the smells of the break room, and then slapped his face to wake himself up.

“If they’re really just goofing off, I won’t let Emi off easily.”

He then swiftly scanned his surroundings, before his eyes landed on a box of cleaning tools.

“Eh? Maou-san, are you going to start cleaning up already?” one of the crew members called out to Maou. He was understandably surprised by why Maou had emerged from the break room with a mop in hand.

“Ahh, well, ah, I’ll be heading out for a bit.”

“Eh? But where are you going with that mop?”

Maou was briefly stuck for an answer, but then he replied in an earnest voice:

“I’m going to eliminate someone annoying.”

“I have no idea what you just sa– ah, wait, Maou-san!”

Maou ignored the employee and ran out.

“Maou-san!”

“Don’t worry about me! I’ll be back!”

“It’s okay if you don’t come back, but please don’t go!”

The bugle for the advance drowned out the crewman’s cries, and Maou leapt aboard his beloved steed, Dullahan-go.

Dullahan’s bell responded to its owner’s battle-lust with a strident ringing.

The Demon King Satan couched his mop like a medieval cavalryman, and in order to avoid being stopped by the police, he started along the roads near Koushuu Boulevard, pedalling swiftly towards Hatsudai Shinjuku ***

“Hmm... angels shouldn’t be allowed to fall, after all...” the perverted scythe-wielding robber muttered as he looked on the purple-glowing cross floating in mid-air, where Emi was bound. Beside him was Suzuno, who was also looking at Emi.

The strong winds whipped Emi’s hair around. She was exhausted, but managed to look down her nose at the two of them.

Above them was an impossibly huge crescent moon. It illuminated Emi – no the Tokyo City Hall’s No. 1 Office Block.

The light shining down on them seemed detached from reality, much like the Demon King’s spatial barrier.

As the place closest to the moon and the sky, the helipad on top of the 1st Office Building was impervious to the clamor of the city below.

“Just be a good girl and give it up.”

Emi – who was bound like a holy man awaiting execution – was limned by purple light over and over again, and the holy magic within her body seemed on the verge of disappearing.

It would seem the perverted scythe user's purple beams could disperse holy magic.

His objective appeared to be the Evolving Holy Sword - One Wing that Emi possessed, but the heavenly silver – which formed the holy sword when combined with holy magic – remained within her body no matter how much of the purple light he hit her with.

“I’m not even trying to resist... tell me what I was supposed to do again?”

As the Hero tasked with slaying the Demon King, Emi’s strength had been recognized by all. The Church had readily used their holy arts to embed the heavenly silver within Emi’s body, but they had not considered what form it took when within her.

The Evolving Holy Sword - One Wing had a real, metallic body, like any other forged weapon, but her exorcising raiment was merely a shroud of light and had no corporeal form.

Therefore, the question had arisen over whether the exorcising raiment was made of heavenly silver.

It was a power she had used naturally in her quest to slay the Demon King, but it was only under these circumstances that she realized for the first time how mysterious that power was.

“That’s enough fooling around. Forget about it and just release me and Chiho,” Emi groaned weakly.

Chiho remained in a daze behind the perverted scythe-wielder and Suzuno, her hands bound.

“Oh no, we can’t do that. I have many... things in store for this lovely little lady.”

The perverted scythe-wielding robber’s shoulders flexed as he laughed.

“...Did you choose to work in front of McGonald’s to drool over pretty girls, Sarue-san?” Emi said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

The perverted scythe-wielding robber's shoulders froze in place.

“Huh, so you noticed.”

“Women are very sensitive to the egotistical displays of idiotic men.”

Emi was nearly powerless and a captive, but she still wielded her tongue like a blade. The scythe-user laughed, and then said: “That’s fine. I do call myself Sarue, after all. However...”

He pulled off the hat which covered his face.

“My *real* name is Sarial. The *Archangel* Sarial.”

Under the hat was a handsome boy's face, with purple eyes. And then—

“Is orange eyeshadow all the rage in Heaven nowadays?”

When the self-proclaimed angel revealed his face, he also revealed the big fluorescent orange stain around his eye.

“Hm... that was pretty hard to remove.”

The angel who called himself Sarial grumbled to himself and smiled bitterly while he shrugged.

While he had removed the face-concealing hat, he was still wearing that PVC cape and camouflage pants, and the orange stain looked bizarre on his immature, yet well-proportioned face.

The revelation of the mysterious foe who had been tormenting her should have been a very dramatic moment, but Emi had to fight to hold back her laughter.

“If you could take it off so easily, then there wouldn't be any point using it as a deterrent.”

“I usually wear sunglasses to hide my purple eyes, so I haven't had any problems.”

“There's a lot more problems with you besides that.”

The overpowering cologne was probably to hide the stench of the

paintball.

His desire to invade the personal space of women was probably part of his nature.

Emi knew Sariel's name. It came up quite often if one studied the scripture of the Holy Church closely. He was probably worshipped as the patron angel of the Inquisition.

He was ranked quite highly in the hierarchy of angels, given that he possessed the title of Archangel.

Those purple beams had been mentioned in Scripture as the Wicked Light of the Fallen, which could cause even a high-ranking angel to fall.

There were those who said that Lucifer had become a fallen angel because of Sariel.

"It was quite worrying. To think this world possessed such fearsome weaponry. Not only did it turn my face orange, but it marked me with a vile odour as well. I even thought about ending my own life."

Emi did not think about who stupid it would be, and thought, *things would have been better if you had just died.*

"I missed the chance to kill you, was forced to mingle with the Demon King, and it affected the next day's work. What a mess. However—"

Sariel the Orange Panda smiled, and looked back to Suzuno.

"—Thanks to her, we could capture you easily. And you even came with a gift!"

Emi followed Sariel's gaze, but Suzuno grit her teeth and lowered her head.

"Sasaki Chiho is a very important specimen. She is a person from this world who knows the Demon King for who he is, but loves him anyway. How has the Demon King's power affected the biology of

the humans who stayed by his side? Studying her for the answers will be *very* rewarding.”

Emi glared at him.

Sariel’s cruel choice of words was one thing, but his intentions were something else entirely.

“Don’t tell me you overheard us speaking at the intersection?!”

At that time, Emi had not felt anyone or anything suspicious.

“You’d make a good detective.”

And then, Sariel admitted to his stalking without any hesitation at all. Emi furrowed her brows and wrinkled her nose, and in that moment Sariel blasted Emi with the Wicked Light of the Fallen.

“Gwaaargh!”

Emi groaned. There was no physical damage, but being hit by the beam felt very unpleasant. It made her nauseous, even.

“The holy sword should never have been in the hands of mankind. Before we give the holy sword to the people of Ente Isla again, I must personally take it back from you. This is Heaven’s will.”

“Aaaaaaahhhhhh!”

After being hit by an exceptionally brilliant blast of light, Emi nearly passed out.

“Hmph, so it’s still not working, huh... hm?”

Sariel stopped firing. Judging, by his thinker’s pose, Sariel seemed to have realised something. He approached the edge of the helipad and looked down from the 243-meter high roof, and smiled bitterly at what he saw.

“Oya oya. It seems a bug has managed to sneak in.”

At this, Suzuno looked up like her forehead had been flicked, and Emi raised her head too.

“Ma...ou...”

Chiho was still dazed, but surprisingly enough, she managed to cry that name.

“I don’t know how he got into this sealed space, but since he’s come all this way, we ought to welcome him. Bell.”

Suzuno shuddered as her name was called.

“It doesn’t look like he brought any of his irritating minions. As he is now, your strength should be more than adequate to defeat the Demon King.”

“...”

Suzuno looked at Emi in panic, but the Hero’s head was lowered and her expression was unreadable.

“Be at ease. So long as this building is bathed in my moonlight, it will not generate any negative emotions that will empower the Demon King. Now go.”

Though her face was pale, Suzuno obeyed Sarel, as though she had given up on something. After all, be it for the Inquisition or the Doctrinal Correction Council, Sarel was still her patron angel.

And then, a voice reached her back, which was so filled with a grim determination.

“...Isn’t this a good thing?”

“!”

Suzuno suddenly drew breath, and froze.

“Once you eliminate the Hero with the holy sword and the Demon King in this world, Ente Isla will be at peace again, as though all this had not happened. Isn’t that a good thing?”

Suzuno told herself that her legs were shaking because of the strong winds, because otherwise she would have to admit it.

She would have to admit that she was a pawn of the Church’s darkness, down to the marrow of her bones.

“What troubles you? As the patron of the Doctrinal Correction Council, I will vouch for the righteousness of your actions. Go now. All I have to do is say a few words and nobody in the Church will dare trouble you for this.”

Sariel spoke to Suzuno’s back in an audacious tone.

“Fundamentally, you knew it would end up like this from the beginning, didn’t you? It is just that the schedule has changed somewhat. The legend of the missing Hero bearing the holy sword will live forever in the songs of mankind, as they enjoy the peace that comes from eliminating the threat of the Demon King. One could say that both Bell and myself came to ensure that outcome. There is no need to show the audience what lies behind the curtain.”

Sariel spoke like it was a trifling matter.

Yes, his way of thinking was right, after all. The only problem at the moment was the matter of defeating the Demon King.

Sariel did not even wish to kill Emilia. After all, could he not achieve world peace and his own objectives without any problems?

“Suzuno-san...”

That voice shattered a fortress of paper which Suzuno had built in her heart.

“...Chiho...dono...”

Chiho was bound and lying on her side. She looked at Suzuno with tears in her eyes.

“Why... why...”

Unable to look directly at her, Suzuno leapt into the sky.

The wind lashed at her, setting her yukata aflutter. Suzuno removed her cross-shaped hairclip with her right hand.

Now free, her hair streamed out behind her like a pair of spreading black wings, and the clip began to shine.

“...Armament of Light.”

A glorious golden mallet appeared, resembling the Hammer of Judgement used during the cruel trials of the Inquisition. It was the symbol of the Grim Reaper, Death Scythe C. Bell.

Bracing her mallet, Suzuno plunged to the earth like a falling star.

“...Please... help me... it’s already...”

A stream of silver tears escaped her eyes, riding the wind where they vanished into the air.

“I don’t want to sacrifice anyone any more!”

“Owaaaaaahhhhh?!” The person at Suzuno’s destination sensed her and shouted.

Suzuno swung her mallet in a single, crisp movement, aiming at the person who seemed to have stopped his bike just then. There was the sound of an explosion and the road was reduced to smithereens, and it looked as though her target had been pulverized as well. However— “That’s dangerous, dummy! What would you do if I died?!”

Maou Sadao lay a scant few centimeters from the mallet, having fallen so that his butt was facing her.

“Ah.”

Maou’s face grew stiff as he saw the face of the hammer, and at what lay crushed against it like a dried squid snack.

“That’s...”

“That’s?”

“DULLAHAN-GOOOOOOOOO!”

Maou’s cry of anguish echoed through the streets and the towers of Western Shinjuku.

He wept as he embraced the scrap that had once been Dullahan-

go, and then he glared at Suzuno.

“Suzuno, you idiot! What have you done! What kind of grudge did you have against Dullahan-go?! Give me back the two months I spent with him! Also, pay for my new bike, anti-burglary insurance, and the fee for the removal of bulky refuse!”

“Shut up!”

“Uwah!”

Suzuno paid Maou no heed, but instead brought her hammer whistling down on his head.

Maou retreated in a panic, and the huge mallet missed him by just a few centimeters again, drenching him in cold sweat.

“Oi, oi, wait, wait, timeout!”

“Shut up!”

“Just, just listen—”

“Shut up shut up *shut up!!*”

“Aiiiiieee!”

Maou turned around and ran from his foe, who was swinging her hammer with all her might and without an ounce of mercy.

“Wait, Demon King Satan!”

“Yeah, right! Or rather, come on! Just hang on a bit!”

Maou ran away at full tilt, trying to pull away from Suzuno.

“One minute! Just one minute!” Maou said, holding out his index finger to Suzuno.

“...?”

Suzuno had a suspicious look on her face, but then—

“!!!!!!”

Suzuno frowned and then she shrieked wordlessly after seeing what Maou did next.

Maou put his mop aside and began calmly removing his clothes.

He took off the unique MgRonald's red T-shirt, leaving the sports singlet that had been washed so many times the material had gone thin. Then, he unbuckled his belt and pulled down his pants. His UNIXLO-made trunks with its cooling and anti-stench construction greeted Suzuno.

After removing his hat, the underwear-clad Maou carefully folded his uniform and pants and placed them by the side of the road. Then he picked up the somewhat dirty mop and told Suzuno: "Sorry for the wait. I'm done."

"What what what what on earth are you doing?!"

In which world could one find a Demon King who stood ready for battle in his underwear?!

The pervert in his underwear and synthetic leather shoes braced his mop and snorted at Suzuno.

"Haaa, you wouldn't know because you don't work. Will that do for you?"

Maou glanced at the neatly-folded uniform beside him.

"The MgRonald's uniform is lent to us! The Demon King's Castle has no more resources to spend on replacing it!"

"What...!"

Despite the circumstances, Suzuno could not help but blush at Maou's bold and forthright declaration.

"And you! 'What on earth are you doing' is supposed to be *my*line! What the hell are you trying to do by getting my crew involved in all this?!"

Maou levelled his mop directly at Suzuno.

"I was prepared to overlook a lot of things since you actually dared to move in beside us and made delicious food for us, but when you mess with my job and my employees? As an acting store

leader, I can't let that slide!"

And just as she wavered in the face of his presence—

"What!"

—Maou lunged at Suzuno's chest.

"Da—"

Suzuno wanted to bend down to avoid the mop, but its head – caked with huge amounts of hair-like black trash – thrust in at her face, and she hastily scrambled back instead.



She was shocked by the way Maou threw a barrage of attacks with the head and the pommel at her, like he was using staff-fighting techniques. Eventually, she managed to catch and deflect the pommel of the broom with one face of her mallet, but just as she was about to deliver an overhand hammerblow onto him—
“Whoa!”

She missed Maou by a hair’s breadth as he jumped back.

This was not a simple leap. He managed to get on top of a traffic light in a single bound. Suzuno’s eyes went wide, and the tips of her ears went red again as she beheld the scene before her.

“This this this, this isn’t the time or place, you pervert!”

“It’s all your fault, isn’t it?!”

Perhaps it was because it had been grazed by the light which wrapped Suzuno’s hammer, but Maou’s singlet tore at the belly, and the fragments flew out into the air.

As she watched this deviant Demon King who was clad only in his boxers, Suzuno said:

“So you *did* have demonic magic left, you perverted Demon King!”

“That’s because I had no idea when someone like you would show up! A trump card’s not a trump card if you don’t save it for the last moment!”

“...When did you find out I wasn’t Japanese!” Suzuno asked, and then Maou sighed in surprise.

“From the very beginning, of course! How is it even possible that a beauty in traditional dress like you would be cooking and cleaning for a bunch of destitute bachelors in Japan? Before I was delighted by it, I was wondering what your angle was.”

In the end, just about everyone except Suzuno herself had suspected her actions.

“What, what about Chiho-dono?!”

“I raised her by hand from the start! Now she’s my right-hand woman, Chi-chan! If you think it was just a shallow relationship you’ve got another thing coming!”

Maou kept his distance from Suzuno as he said this, and landed on the ground.

“Still, it’s a shame. I thought someone who’d come all the way to challenge me would be someone competent who would get along with Emi. But in the end you’re cut from the same cloth as Olba.”

Suzuno gnashed her teeth.

“You say all these pretty things, but you’ll sacrifice anything and anyone for power! I’d cry if someone like you actually managed to get me! What the hell difference is there between you and us demons, huh?!”

“Shut, shut up...!”

“Let me tell you this. I’m a demon who loves other people’s resentment.”

Maou looked Suzuno in the eye and said:

“Don’t you have the slightest bit of shame for tricking Emi and getting Chi-chan involved in this?”

“Shut up!!!!!”

“Gwaaargh!”

“...Eiii!”

Suzuno thought he had avoided the hit, but she ended up striking him dead center instead.

That blow knocked his unsightly, underwear-clad body into the distance, where he dropped to all fours like a squashed bug.

“...Guh, I felt that... hah.”

“What are you doing? Why didn’t you dodge it!”

Suzuno ran over to Maou in a panic, despite the fact that she had

sent him flying.

His skin was exposed, so his body was covered in scratches.

The way he coughed up blood was proof that the mallet strike had damaged his internal organs.

“I, I wanted to avoid it, but, ah, my demonic magic was gone, and I couldn’t move fast enough...”

“Hah?!”

“Before, I came here, I used hypnosis, through a phone call... then, when I came here I also... ahhh, I miscalculated. Should have saved a bit more.”

Maou finally stood up, but he immediately collapsed face-down.

Right now, all Suzuno needed to do was swing her mallet with all her might, and the Demon King Satan would go the way of his beloved steed. However— “...Why... why don’t you do it? It’s a chance... cough... for you to become a hero...”

Maou smiled without any fear even as he groaned in pain. In the face of that, all Suzuno could do was hang her head. Right now, the Demon King should not have any trump cards to play, no way for him to force her into a corner. However, she could not do anything.

“It must be very shameful, huh.”

“...Eh?”

“You wanted to defeat me fair and square, so you brought Emi here and used Chi-chan’s phone to call me. But you really wanted me to defeat an opponent you couldn’t stand up to, didn’t you?”

Maou raised a trembling hand to point into the distant sky – no, he was pointing at the roof of the City Hall.

“You... even noticed that...”

Suzuno’s golden mallet vanished, and she fell to her knees beside Maou’s body.

“That... was simple deduction. Someone like you who works and moves carefully behind enemy lines would never do anything as foolish as abducting Emi or Chi-chan. If you really wanted to, you would have made a nice bowl of poison to kill me with and immediately gone back without caring about Emi.”

A pink cell phone fell from the mouth of Suzuno's yukata sleeve. Its strap was festooned in accessories that resembled McDonald's items. It was Chiho's cell phone.

“Plus, I didn't think anyone who could casually kidnap Emi would sit around and watch Chi-chan let the phone ring for the full 99 seconds. Anyone who could do that would be making the call instead. Ah – you just swung right at me without caring about how hard you hit. If there's any bone damage, you're paying for my medical bills.”

Maou shivered as he spoke and inspected his body. Then, he slowly rose to his feet.

“...An angel has come.”

Suzuno held onto Maou's hand as he tried to get up.

“No wonder. No human from Ente Isla would be able to stand up to them.”

Maou immediately believed Suzuno's words.

“Why?”

“...He said it was to take back Emilia's holy sword.”

“Hm? Not to defeat me?”

Maou was somewhat confused. Why was an angel trying to take the holy sword back from the Hero while the Demon King was alive and well?

“I don't know... he said, it was something humanity could not be allowed to possess...”

“Well, if he was just taking care of things from that side over here,

then why would Chi-chan...”

Maou had casually glossed over the matter of the holy sword that might well determine the fate of humanity in Ente Isla as exemplified by Suzuno. That was because to demons, it was better that holy swords and the like were nowhere near them.

Suzuno hesitated a little before continuing.

“He said she was a valuable specimen. If they studied her... they wanted to find out what kind of person would continue to admire the Demon King even after knowing who he was...”

“...You and...”

At this moment, Suzuno reflexively raised her head.

That was because there was a cold anger coiling in Maou’s voice, one she had never heard before.

“Oi.”

“What, what do you want...”

“Who did this? Who is this depraved, mentally-defective perverted bastard?”

“Eh... depraved... eh?”

Maou seized the confused Suzuno by the shoulders and shouted:

“Tell me the name of that piece-of-shit angel who frightened the most valuable member of my crew and kidnapped her! *Tell me now, damn you!*”

“It’s Sa-Sariel-sama...”

Maou’s terrifying force of personality compelled an honest answer from Suzuno.

“...The Wicked Light of the Fallen, huh. No wonder. Emi should have lost.”

“You, you knew?”

Suzuno was surprised by how Maou could immediately name the ability of an archangel. Maou replied:

“I learned a little about him in the past. Dammit. So it’s that womanizing bastard. I see now, Sarue Mitsuki!”

Maou had finally managed to make the connection between that rude midget of a store leader and this incident.

“W-wait, do you plan to go with this body of yours?”

Suzuno immediately tried to stop a fuming Maou as he tried to charge into the City Hall.

“Of course! My adorable little kouhai is frightened and waiting for me!”

“You’re being reckless! Sariel-sama’s power grows as he gets closer to the moon! You’re out of demonic magic! How can you beat Sariel-sama on that rooftop—”

“That’s why I can’t run away.”

Maou’s cold words halted an increasingly agitated Suzuno in her tracks.

“As shift manager, I’m responsible for anything that happens to my crew while I’m in charge. Chi-chan is an important member of my crew and someone I need to protect. Also, the fact that Sariel came after Emi is fundamentally my fault. I’m not shameless enough to palm everything off onto my subordinates and run away.”

“!!”

Suzuno froze in surprise as she heard those words she had never considered in the past.

“How can I conquer the world if I can’t even do what I should be doing here? I’m going! In the worst-case scenario, I can still take Chi-chan and run even if I can’t defeat Sariel!” Maou shouted. Though he winced and covered up his pain-wracked body, he

continued running forward.

“Uoooooh! Wait for me, Chi-chan!”

Maou practically flew into the main lobby of the City Hall building. Suzuno was briefly stunned but then came round, looking to the rooftop.

Sariel had sealed this space off so nobody would get suspicious, but the elevators did not work and getting to the ceiling would take even more strength.

Even if that were not the case, she had no faith that Maou could win in an unarmed charge.

“Why, why is it that a demon of all people is telling me this?”

Suzuno looked to the sky and murmured.

“If you say things like this... what kind of Demon King *are* you?”

Then, she picked up Chiho’s cell phone and rose. There was a name with a heart at the end of it.

Said name read “Maou-san <3”.

“After the Demon King said all that, even I can’t go on like this any more.”

Suzuno wiped away her brimming tears and took a deep breath to calm herself down.

Do not mistake you who you have to protect. Do not lose sight of the justice you should uphold.

This was what her heart had been warning her about, both as the Chief Executor of the Inquisition and as a cleric.

Had she not descended upon Japan, a distant otherworld, for precisely that purpose?

Suzuno racked her brains and searched for a way to validate the narrow paths where her quest for justice had taken her.

And then she recalled something Sariel had said.

What the Demon King used – negative energy.

Suzuno raised her head and tightly clutched her fallen hair ornament, soaring into the night sky with her back to the City Hall.

“Hmm... I’d rather not do this, but I have no choice. This is terribly ungentlemanly behavior to show a lady, but please take it as a matter of business. Do forgive me for this. I had hoped that the heavenly silver would separate from your body after exposing you to the Wicked Light of the Fallen, but now it seems I must remove it directly.”

“When you say directly...”

While she was drained after being blasted several times by the Wicked Light of the Fallen, Emi tensed herself up in danger as Sariel reached for the buttons of her blouse, glaring and shouting.

“Wait, waitwaitwait, what are you doing?!”

“I shall directly extract the heavenly silver from your physical body. Ahhh, no, it won’t end up in some splatterpunk movie scene, so be at ease. Think of it as a form of painless surgery using holy arts...”

“That’s not the point! Wait... Stop! I’ll kill you!”

Emi shook her head, the only thing she could move, but Sariel paid her no heed at all. He slowly, deliberately, and carefully began unbuttoning the thin blouse Emi wore as part of her work attire.

“What, what are you trying to do to Yusa-san, you pervert!”

That accusatory voice whipped across Sariel’s head from behind. Suddenly, Sariel stopped what he was doing and turned around.

“I do not wish to censure a lady, given that I am a gentleman of Heaven, but if I had to choose between my personal judgement and recovering the heavenly silver, I would choose to complete the mission first.”

“You’re horrible! You’re just disgusting! Why are angels all horrible people?!”

Sasaki Chiho, the girl Crestia Bell had brought along, glared at Sarel with eyes full of hate.

Chiho had woken before Bell had eliminated the interloper, and after Bell had disappeared, she had been cursing Sarel with everything she could throw at him.

“You *do* know the Demon King has Lucifer, an angel, by his side, don’t you? Please don’t mention the two of us in the same breath!”

“While Urushihara-san is an insensitive, disgusting NEET, at least he’s not a pervert!”

It did not sound like she was taking Urushihara’s side at all.

“Yes, yes, I’ll listen to what you have to say after we go back to Ente Isla. Quiet down for now.”

“Wait, I can’t just ignore that! What are you going to do to Chiho-chan?!”

This time it was Emi’s turn to protest.

“Are you going to bring Chiho back to Ente Isla as well?”

“Of course. How else will I study her?”

“And you’re saying that so casually... so get your hands off me!”

“I am a gentleman. I will do my best to avert my eyes, so settle down! The fact is, I’m not interested in someone as small as you.”

Sarel grandly proclaimed the one thing any man should never have said.

“I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you *for sure!*”

Emi’s rage meter exploded off the charts, but she recovered her senses and spat at Sarel.

“You think I’m going to let you take Chiho-chan back with you?! You’re going to regret this!”

“Honestly, you really are noisy. Did you think I would cut up a girl like this as though she were some lab animal?”

Sariel furrowed his brow, as though in surprise.

“I rate her aesthetic appeal very highly. After I finish my research, I shall ascend her to an angel and make her my wife.”

By looks alone, that smile of his might qualify as angelic, but the words which accompanied it and the people whom he addressed them to made that smile one of infinite vulgarity.

“I’d rather die!”

Chiho shouted her refusal with bared teeth and all her strength.

“Then, please allow me to examine every nook and cranny of your body. After all, I wish to see how an intimate relationship with the Demon King Satan changes the human mind and body.”

“You’re a villain beyond saving! I feel like throwing up when you touch me! You lecher!”

“Molester!”

“Pervert!”

“Kill yourself!”

“Degenerate!”

“Fake angel!”

“Voyeur!”

“Panty thief!”

“That’s enough!”

Sariel’s shout broke through the pincer attack from Emi and Chiho.

“Is that quite enough from the two of you!? I’ve been treating you kindly, you know!”

A furious Sariel, pulled his hand away from Emi’s chest and

floated into the sky.

And then, that scythe appeared out of nowhere. Was that scythe made of heavenly silver as well? Full of wrath, Sariel pressed the tip of the scythe into Emi's half-open blouse.

"Frankly speaking, recovering the heavenly silver is more important than preserving your life, Emilia! Don't get carried away, damn you! I have no problem with cutting you down right now!"

Chiho drew in a breath as she saw Sariel's genuine anger, but Emi was not afraid.

"Give it your best shot, then. Even I don't know how the Heavenly Silver has bonded to my body. My only regret is that I won't be able to see the look on your face when the heavenly silver vanishes with my corpse!"

Sariel clicked his tongue as Emi staunchly continued her resistance.

"Then, you won't mind if I deal with this little lady first, then."

Sariel brought his scythe before Emi's eyes and turned his purple pupils to Chiho.

"This girl has been close to demons. By sending her to Ente Isla and examining her body, we might be able to help those people who have suffered due to the influence of the demons."

Chiho's face turned pale at that. All she could do was glare at Sariel, but even the always-reliable Emi was bound now, and she was an unexceptional high school girl. She could not do anything if she were thrown into an unknown world by herself.

"You'll regret so much as laying a finger on Chiho-chan."

Sariel turned back to Emi, laughing in mockery.

"You've been talking big since just now, but what can you do in your current state?"

Emi glared darkly at the contemptible Sariel.

“It’s not me.”

“What?”

Her hatred brimmed over, beyond even what she felt for Sariel, and she clicked her tongue.

“I’m saying that if you do anything to that girl, the Demon King won’t sit by idly.”

“The Demon King?”

Sariel laughed, more amused than surprised.

“I was wondering what you were going to say, but then you mention the Demon King? Is the Hero Emilia begging for the Demon King’s help? So you *did* fight shoulder to shoulder with him!”

“It’s not like that. Didn’t you notice even after opening a store in front of MgRonald’s?”

Emi felt a black fog drawing over her heart, but she persevered and said:

“That girl is a crew member from MgRonald’s. The Demon King is an assistant store leader and a shift manager. If she’s in danger, protecting her is her superior’s job.”

“Have you gone mad, Emilia? You really think the Demon King would be bound by the rules of this world? There’s no way you don’t know how the Demon King Satan abandoned the power he lived for to live as a destitute human. Even if the Demon King showed up in that state, what could he do against an archangel like myself?”

Indeed, right now Maou had less demonic magic than a lesser demon, and he was a young adult little different from a human being. However, while his ways and personality had changed, the useless pride that had made him the Demon King remained the same.

“He isn’t *bound* by the rules of this world. He *lives* by them, in his

own way. He's an A-class crew member of the Hatagaya Station branch of McDonald's, a shift manager called Maou Sadao."

"Yusa-san..."

Emi sought Chiho's approval with her eyes.

Chiho's eyes were moist, and she nodded forcefully.

"Marvellous! The Hero placing her faith in the Demon King! Kukuku, I'd like to invite that Demon King who thinks like a human to join us! Only... he can't fly, and Bell's Armament of Light ought to have smashed him to sightless atoms by now!"

"I have a question about that, actually."

Emi looked at Chiho once more.

"Did you even consider why she brought Chiho-chan along?"

"Bell obeys me. What other purpose could there be but to provide me with an additional hostage to make you comply? Also, it would be a pain to be reported to the police, so taking all the baggage with me and leaving no traces behind is also another reason."

Emi's handbag and Chiho's schoolbag were in the corner of the helipad.

Sariel's words drew a smile of pity from Emi.

"Then, shouldn't Bell have taken Chiho somewhere out of sight from me? That would have made her more effective as a hostage. In any case, her value as a hostage decreases if I don't feel uneasy about her safety. It's not like she's a human who'll do reckless things, and..."

Emi was not too sure herself. However, she felt that Suzuno's uneasiness at the intersection was the answer.

"She is the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council, which corrects erroneous teachings. You'd best watch that dog you raised lest it bites your hand."

“When the time comes, I’ll just discipline her as well. There’s no need to worry at all. I *am* an archangel, and no cleric of the Holy Church should be able to defy me.”

The first office block of Tokyo’s City Hall was 243 meters tall. At that height, the wind currents were very strong.

Just as the powerful winds tossed Emi’s long hair around—

“Guh... hah... sorry for intruding while you’re busy, hoo... hah...”

The mighty winds swallowed the weak male voice.

However, that voice reached their ears.

“Why... are the elevators out of order... ha... ha....”

That place was made to accommodate helicopters, but a man who was the last thing from a helicopter stood there instead.

“Ah... ah!”

Chiho smiled out of surprise and delight, even as her eyes brimmed with tears.

“Maou-san!”

He held his somewhat-dirty mop in his right hand, and he was topless and only dressed in a pair of boxers. He was covered in wounds, but in the eyes of a lovesick girl, he was nothing less than her knight in shining armor, come to rescue her from danger.

On the other hand, Emi was stunned speechless by the unmentionable state of the Demon King that had dropped from the heavens on the back of his bicycle to save her.

“Don’t look at me!”

“Is that the first thing you should be saying?!”

Panting and on the verge of collapse, Maou still managed to make a crack at Emi.

“Ah, don’t expose yourself! Why, why are you like that?! Get out of my sight!”

Emi's chest was exposed, but she could not do anything about it on account of how she was bound. All she could do was shout.

“...This... is quite surprising.”

Sariel's jaw dropped reflexively. He removed his scythe from Emi's chest and turned to face Maou.

“Look at you. Only human, and without recovering your demonic magic. Did you defeat Bell?”

“...Does it look like that? After this treatment, I feel like I've been used,” Maou said in a singularly unhappy tone.

“I'm not too sure... But you don't look hurt. Even so, it's hard to believe that you're still showing your face in front of me. You really aren't the Demon King we know any more, Satan.”

“Even I didn't expect the midget store leader opposite us, the one slathered in utterly tasteless cologne, to be the Wicked Light of the Fallen. Are you *still* chasing the asses of female angels?”

“...What did you say—”

Sariel's tone turned severe all of a sudden.

“There's a lot of people who are annoyed by you. Well, it's not like any of them would say it.”

After casually tossing out that cutting line, Maou turned back to Chiho and Emi.

“I told you, don't look at me!”

Maou ignored Emi's thoughtless struggling and looked Sariel straight in the eye.

“Well, frankly speaking, I don't give a damn about what you do in Heaven. What I can't let slide is that fact that you hurt one of the people in my store, and gave Chiho bad memories, you little bastard.”

“Maou-san!” Chiho cried, her voice filled with gratitude.

“Isn’t that right? You’re at work right until you reach home!”

“...Maou-san?”

Chiho froze at the non sequitur.

“Being a manager means taking responsibility for one’s crew members! Don’t think I’ll forgive you for getting one of my people involved in that bullshit from Ente Isla!”

“...Maou-san...”

This time, the voice calling out to Maou was filled with sadness.

“As the acting store leader, I have a vested interest in the safety of my employees! When you put it that way, Chi-chan is an important subordinate of mine! As a Demon King and a shift manager, I will *never* abandon my people!”

“...Hah.”

Maou seemed to have struck a heavy blow to Chiho without even realizing it. Chiho lowered her head in despair, fighting back the tears.

“I have no idea what you’re trying to say. All I know is...”

Sariel’s purple eyes glowed.

“...You must be really stupid to try and interfere with my mission using that weak body of yours!”

Golden sunfire erupted from Sariel’s body. The holy magic that accompanied its release forced Emi to shut her eyes.

“Ah – I don’t give a damn about the holy sword or heavenly silver or whatnot. If it makes that vicious hag more docile, then go ahead, by all means. I’m fine with just taking Chi-chan back...”

Maou broke out in a cold sweat. The wave of holy magic was such that a regular demon would be purified instantly.

“But that doesn’t seem to be the case... dammit, why.”

Light and electrical discharges began flashing out from within

Sariel's body. Maou, without his demonic magic, and the others, could not even hope to lay a finger on Sariel's body.

Maou braced his mop and thought about how he could escape with Chiho.

“?!”

How could one describe the change in the air?

Right now, the wave of Sariel's holy magic should have made the atmosphere of the helipad purer than anywhere else on earth. Yet, it felt heavy, like there was a wet weight in the air.

Then, the tension and unhappiness in the air – which seemed to have been repelled earlier as though by static electricity – roiled forth like clouds, as though to force back the holy magic.

“What, what is this...”

Sariel began to feel uneasy about the ominous mood in the air.

“I don't... feel good...”

Chiho moaned in pain, while Emi looked around, unsure of what was going on.

Only Maou seemed at ease among all of this. No, rather than at ease, Maou's eyes were starting to glow red to resist Sariel's sunfire.

While he had been briefly confused as well, Maou had instantly figured out what was going on here.

“Ah – it can't be helped now that it's ended up like this. I don't want to save Emi at all,” he muttered pointlessly to himself.

“Oi, Sariel. Are you trying to stain my resume with the sin of scaring Chi-chan?”

Maou took a step toward Sariel, his voice mighty and resonant.

With just that step, the pressure filling the air grew heavier.

Shocked, Sariel shouted, “This, this is demonic magic...! You bastard, why?!”

Just now, he should have been little more than Maou Sadao, an average young man.

However, the air around Maou had changed in an instant.

This sense of oppression. The crimson eyes. The sense of gloom which snaked through the air.

“Wait, Demon King! If you do this now...”

Emi noticed the change in Maou, but he smiled calmly and shook his head.

“Don’t worry,” he said, and patted his hips.

“These boxers are made of a soft material marketed with stretchability as a selling point. They won’t tear.”

He was rattling off those lines like an incantation used by transforming superheroes.

“Who cares about your boxers you idiot—!”

Emi’s shriek explosively dispersed the inauspicious air hanging about the helipad.

Maou’s exposed upper torso was wreathed in a sinister red light. His muscles bulged and his lower body was in a monstrous form. Also, the UNIXLO summer boxers faithfully served their purpose, despite the rapid and massive expansion of Maou’s body.

The bloody-eyed and cloven-hoofed Demon King descended from the skies of Tokyo.

“Hohohohoho~”

The Demon King Satan, naked except for a pair of boxers, flexed his neck to stretch his body.

“Ah – what a good form. Now, how should I deal with him...”

Satan relaxed his joints as he said so, and the answer was—

“You fool! Why are you transforming without regard for Chiho-dono?!”

Her long hair swaying in the wind, a golden mallet in hand, she soared through the sky like a comet from Shinjuku station.

“Bell!”

Sariel glared angrily at Suzuno – no, Crestia Bell – as she landed beside Chiho and erected a protective barrier of holy magic.

“Puhaaa~”

In that moment, Chiho exhaled deeply and began gasping for air.

“Ah... that felt terrible.”

“Are you alright?”

“Yes, I think... ah, Su-Suzuno-san!”

Chiho shrank away from Bell, since she had seen her send Emilia flying once. However, her eyes went wide as she saw her cell phone being returned to her.

“My apologies. I will explain the situation to you later. Right now...”

Saying so, Bell’s eyes turned to the demon with the ominous red eyes.

“Please let me use the person who is important to you, Chiho-dono.”

“Bell! Are you insane?!”

Suzuno moved protectively to keep Chiho behind her back as she delivered her stoic answer.

“Forcing a false peace onto the people, causing havoc in another world, betraying those we should be protecting and those seeking faith – are these the things that the gods call justice? As the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council, I cannot allow this false justice to pass unanswered!”

“Are you even going to use the Demon King for that?! Correcting the doctrines sounds grand, but the Doctrinal Correction Council

merely practices a corrupt form of justice, no different from that of those bloodthirsty demons!”

“Shut up! At the very least, the life which the Demon King lives in Japan as Maou Sadao does not fly in the face of justice!”

“Oho, I feel really popular now. I guess I’m acting store leader material, aren’t I?”

As Satan listened to the gripping philosophical debate, he smirked in satisfaction over a tiny accomplishment.

“Still, the Hero and the angels have been coming off as pretty bad characters. I just live every day of my life correctly.”

Satan took a step, which dug a small divot into the helipad’s surface.

Fearful of Maou, Sariel stopped arguing and soared away, pulling open the distance between them. Satan felt it was a foolish gesture, and then he asked Bell: “Bell, how did you gather all this demonic magic...?”

Even Satan had not expected a surge of such power within Sariel’s sealed space.

His plan for the worst-case scenario had been to take Chiho and run, which was why he was very suspicious.

“I am very sorry to the people who took Shinjuku Station today.”

As she said this, she glanced back to the sky through which she had flown.

“Eh?”

“Ehhhhhh?! ”

Chiho and Emi looked at Bell as one.

“They call it a transformer, am I correct? I cut the lines which linked important facilities to the roadside power cables. I thought the anger of the stopped train would fill the land...

“That’s a terrorist attack!”

Ironically, it was Satan the world conqueror who was saying that.

“Do, do, do you know how many trains pass through Shinjuku?! Just stopping JR alone will affect all the railways along the Kanto region!”

“No wonder. It would seem my hypothesis was correct. The image of the mission is true to life. Even in Ente Isla, people get frustrated when their rented coaches do not come on time. If many trains were late, it would surely amass a lot of power...”

“I’m not praising your investigative skills, and we don’t have stagecoaches for rent!”

Satan’s full-bore sarcasm stirred up the flows of demonic magic—

“Uwah!”

—And the barrier protecting Chiho was blasted away, and she nearly fell off the helipad.

“Ma-Maou-san! Please be careful!”

“Ah, sorry, sorry...”

“Ah, still... that was Demon King-san, right? Demon King-san? Satan-san? Oh no, I’m getting embarrassed calling you by your first name...”

Maou ignored the girl who was blushing in flagrant ignorance of the present circumstances.

“Well, well, we’ll leave that for later. Oi, Shrimpy Sarel. As a merciful Demon King, I will allow you to choose.”

Satan arrogantly looked down on Sarel.

“Run with your tail between your legs, or let me beat the crap out of you to settle the score. Which do you prefer?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

The scythe-wielding angel spread his vast, pure white wings and

glared at Satan.

“Demon King Satan! I will defeat you and then complete my objective!”

Sariel soared up, gathering holy magic with his back to the moon.

“A Demon King who can’t muster up his demonic magic without doping up on the negative energy of humans is nothing to be afraid of.”

“Shut up, you perverted angel.”

Sariel’s wings flared like two moons in the night sky.

“Lunar Wing Thunder!”

The beams of moonlight avoided Emi, Chiho, and Bell, precisely targeting Satan. It was quite laudable that even while angered, he had not forgotten his feminist values of not harming women.

“You underestimate my power.”

Satan raised his hands, and—

“Hrgk!”

With a simple expulsion of breath, he stopped the moonlight thunderbolts.

“Wh-what...?!”

“It’s nothing much. You’re just a big fish in a small pond.”

Satan snorted at Sariel, who had exclaimed in surprise.

“You rate your powers too highly. Do you want me to tell you the truth about your powers?”

Satan was actually taking the thunderbolts and gathering them to his side. Sariel was the one who had fired them, but Satan was shaping and manipulating that sacred thunder like it was his own power.

“You think that the Wicked Light of the Fallen is so powerful

because you haven't fought anyone who doesn't use holy magic, have you?"

After mashing the energy Sariel had released into a single mass, like chain shot from a cannon, he threw it back at Sariel with sheer arm-strength, like an arrow of light.

"What?!"

Sariel hurriedly tried to dispel his technique. As Maou's ball of lightning drew close, he fired beams from his eyes to destroy his own attack.

"You're pretty much invincible when facing people who use holy magic. However—"

Maou generated a ball of black flame that was around the size of a softball. He then threw it at the airborne Sariel like a championship league baseball pitcher.

"When you meet anyone other than that, you're like a frog in a well! You should have picked your opponents more wisely."

In the instant that little ball reached Sariel, it exploded into a roaring inferno which engulfed him.

"Abbahhhhhh!"

"Selling your fried wings would only disgrace Sentucky."

Sariel screamed from inside the black fireball.

Satan snapped his fingers, and the infernal flame vanished in an instant. Sariel should have been protected by holy magic, but he looked like he had been burned all over.

"There we go~"

Maou gently swung his mop down at Sariel's neck.

"Yeeart!"

The cross of violet light binding Emi collapsed as Sariel went unconscious, and Emi fell towards the helipad.

Sariel thumped against the ground, while Maou was below him to catch Emi, who was exhausted, weakened and could not even break her fall.

“Oi, are you okay, Emi?”

“...What...”

Emi was still panting as she turned to Maou with a depressed look on her face.

“You *do* know I mercifully caught you before you could hit the ground, right?”

“...”

Emi remembered something which someone had said to her. Then she gnashed her teeth in annoyance, wrinkled her brow and snorted.

“...That’s because it couldn’t be helped, you have to remember.”

This Hero’s tongue was always ready to strike, no matter what sort of circumstances she was in.

Satan smiled bitterly, and then placed her gently on the ground. Then, he said:

“Oi, Emi. In front.”

“Eh?”

Maou seemed to be holding something back as he thumped his chest.

“In front. Button up in front!”

It took a moment before Emi realised what he was talking about, at which point she threw her shoe at Satan.

“Dammit, woman! Seriously, you *do* know this hurts even if I’m a demon, right?”

She did not waste words, but simply hit Satan straight in the face with her shoe.

“I told you not to look!”

Emi covered up her chest, her face red. Then she turned away from Satan and buttoned up her blouse.



Satan began to get mad.

“Hey, it’s your fault for spacing out like that! I was just being a gentleman and warning you! It’s not like it gets smaller when I look at it argharghaaaaargh!”

It was not Emi – who had already thrown both her shoes at him – who punished Satan for his crude words, but Bell, wielding her mallet.

“Se~ri~o~us~ly~you~guys–!”

“I could not simply leave things be, and I accidentally...”

Bell calmly returned her mallet to its place over her shoulder as she said so.

“Ah, ah, ah, well, the pervert’s defeated, so could we not fight...”
Chiho called out from inside the barrier of holy magic.

“What?!”

“What?!”

Bell and Emi glared coldly at Chiho for some reason. Chiho wondered why they were not looking directly at her, but at her chest or thereabouts.

“Ah, I’m... I’m sorry.”

She obediently backed down.

Emi knew that Bell was thinking about the same thing she was, and a strange of camaraderie filled her.

As the two women stared at Satan, he replied, “Ah – I’ve had it. Why did I have to save you? I would have done fine just escaping with Chi-chan. Ah – what a loss!”

He ignored his loss for words and vented his spleen. Then, with an air of resignation all around him:

『Gate, open!』

He opened a Gate before himself, big enough for one person to fit through.

“W-wait! You, don’t tell me you plan to...”

Emi was shocked by how Satan could easily open a Gate in front of her, and she instinctively moved to stop him.

“Ahhhhh, how I want to go back! But I can’t!”

Saying so, Satan picked up the fallen Sarii and casually chucked him through the Gate, like he was dumping empty McDonald’s wrappers into the trash.

“Ahhhhh!”

“Demon King! What are...”

“Maou-san?”

Disposing of the Archangel like this was so cruel that even his victims exclaimed for him. However—

“I’m not going to kill him. He still has power inside himself. If he’s lucky, he’ll end up somewhere inhabited. Whether or not he can return safely to Ente Isla is a different matter,” Maou shrugged.

『Gate close! Close sesame! Or something like that...』

As usual, he incanted a spell which did not even sound like a spell, and neatly closed the Gate he had opened.

The sealed space vanished when its caster did, and the clamor of nighttime Shinjuku slowly returned. With the noise of the city as his background music, the Demon King turned to face the slack-jawed Emi and the others.

“Well, it couldn’t be helped. Leaving him around would have complicated matters. Plus, executing him would be troublesome, so this was the best way.”

“But, it’s not like he’s bulky garbage or anything...”

“I don’t want to kill an archangel and start a full-scale war with

heaven. Right now, Sariel's in a state where he can't even go back if he wanted to, thanks to his failure. So basically everything's been neatly concluded, except for his work appraisal."

They could not respond, but Emi and Bell wondered if things could really be resolved that casually.

"Then, the question now is..."

Satan dusted his hands off. He seemed to have forgotten about Sariel entirely, and then he looked at the frowning Bell.

"Time for cleanup. Bell, go."

"By cleanup you mean...?"

"The hell are you saying, 'by cleanup you mean'?! You can't leave the entire Kanto region paralyzed just like that! You need to go fix the power lines and transformers, and then there's the fact that someone might be coming here because Sariel's sealed space is dispelled! Hurry up and go! I need to get back to the shop! To them I'm still running an errand!"

Bell could not hide her consternation at the Demon King Satan spouting lines that were completely identical to what Maou Sadao might have said.

"Ah, right, Emi."

"What, what do you want..."

Satan glanced at his kouhai, the female high schooler within a barrier of holy magic.

"Send Chi-chan back properly this time. Her mother's worried."

It was not Emi or Chiho who was surprised by this, but Bell. She looked at Satan – who stood several times taller than her – as though he were some kind of alien.

Only one person – Sasaki Chiho – smiled in satisfaction.

"Maou-san's a good person after all."

“Ahhhh, what a pain.

Satan dusted his hands off.

“As a king, I take care of my subordinates, and I will make sure the domain I rule is well maintained.”

“And he still did that ahead of everything else.”

Chiho counterattacked with a smile. Satan frowned, not quite sure what to do.

“Ahhhh, that’s enough! Oi, Bell, let’s go!”

The Demon King grabbed her by the collar, and then fled as though he was running away.

As their forms vanished into the distance, Chiho finally emerged from behind the barrier.

“Ah, Yusa-san?”

“...”

Emi put her hands on her chest and looked in the direction where Satan and Bell were headed. Then she wrinkled her brow and looked at Chiho.

“Only today. Just for you,” she grumbled resentfully. Chiho heard it that and smiled bitterly.

“Then, Yusa-san, may I ask a favor of you?”

“...What is it?”

Chiho looked worriedly in the opposite direction where Maou had gone, to the sky above Hatagaya.

“I’m a bit worried when Maou-san said he was still running an errand.”

“Seriously... dammit...”

A fatigued Maou Sadao finally stepped out of the taxi at the

Hatagaya station of the Keio Line.

“Haha... hahahaha, well, ah, that, ah. I heard from Chiho-dono that the Demon King had once repaired the Capital Expressway, so I thought that I should waste your demonic magic by affecting as large an area as possible...”

“Bullshit, you didn’t think at all!”

Kamazuki Suzuno broke out in a cold sweat as she smiled weakly.

What Satan and Bell saw from the sky above Shinjuku was nothing less than unprecedented chaos.

From what Bell had said, the damage to Shinjuku Station ought to have been little more than a few severed power lines. Caught off guard, Satan stared at the thoroughly obliterated electrical transformer.

“No, ah, well, you see, I could not cut the lines, so all I could do was hit them with my mallet...”

Maou flicked Bell on the forehead to shut her up in the middle of her quiet explanation.

He had to fully repair the transformer, various related attachments, and then calm all the chaos along the Kanto region. Combined with the Gate through which he had chucked the angel, the net result was that he had expended all his demonic magic, leaving the Demon King Satan as the underwear-clad Maou Sadao.

In the end, Bell had not done any cleanup at all.

He calmly considered whether he was in mortal danger, having exhausted his demonic magic while her holy magic was practically untouched. But if that were the case, why had she watched Satan use his demonic magic to fix everything in silence?

Bell had retrieved the tired and weak-legged Maou’s uniform for him from where he had left it in front of the City Hall before they had caught a cab.

He had no idea what had changed her mind like this, but Maou Sadao had other things to consider besides asking for the reason behind it.

By the time they reached the Hatagaya Station branch of McDonald's it was almost 12 midnight.

"Demon King, what's wrong?"

Maou had been walking on eggshells and jumping at shadows ever since he got out of the cab, and a surprised Suzuno asked him about it. However, there was no time to explain; he had to get back to the store as soon as possible.

However, the consequences of leaving the store for two hours during his shift reared their ugly head.

Maou froze as he saw the person walking toward him from inside, under the lights of the store.

"...What's the meaning of this, Maa-kun?"

"Ki-Kisaki-san..."

Kisaki was dressed in a suit and looking down on Maou from above. Even when she was silhouetted by the store's light, he could clearly make out her stern expression "What's the meaning of--"

"I got a call, and apparently something happened to Chi-chan..."

Kisaki transfixed Maou with a razor-sharp gaze like she were the Hero.

"Not only did you take a mop and run out of the store, you made a lot of trouble for the others."

"Ah... no, that..."

Maou furrowed his brows and turned slightly aside. Suzuno seemed to have sensed some kind of threat as well, because she was frozen in place beside Maou.

"Aren't we bold? You didn't even win back the customers we lost

in the morning, and then you, as the shift manager, skipped work for *two hours* without informing anyone where you went. Was it a date? Huh?”

“Ah, that...”

Maou was completely speechless, and his mind was blank.

He had not expected Kisaki to come back, but when he thought about it, it would only be natural for the other crew members to be worried when he ran out of the store after getting Urushihara’s call.

The time needed to fix the railways had been much greater than expected thanks to the drain on his demonic power, and then he had to let Suzuno take back the uniform he had left in front of the City Hall building, all of which had wasted a lot of time.

And then, the fact that he had returned with a yukata-clad girl meant that it was hardly strange for people to think he had gone on a date.

Even so, Kisaki would not understand the truth, but he could not give her an explanation that she would accept, and clumsy lies would only upset Kisaki more...

“Maou-san came to help me.”

“What?”

Kisaki looked up at the voice of the third party, and then she realised that this girl was a fresh face.

When had she showed up there? Maou wondered. He had not expected to hear that voice at all, and things felt like they were spiralling out of control around him.

“...And you are?”

“My name is Yusa. I’m a friend of Sasaki Chiho’s... and—”

She looked at the pitiful profile of the man who was sweating bullets.

“–And of Maou-san,” she said clearly.

The blank-faced Maou looked even more blankly at Emi.

Emi shifted her eyes, focusing on Kisaki.

“A friend of Maa-kun?”

“Yes. I was going home with Chiho and this Kamazuki-san when we were attacked by a depraved pervert, but Maou-san came to save us when we were hiding.”

“A depraved pervert? Come to think about it, I heard that something happened at the Sasazuka intersection.”

“We were just three girls and could not resist. Even hiding was hard enough...”

Kisaki listened to Emi’s story, only half-believing her.

“W-what, no, that’s what happened...”

And so Suzuno instantly went along with Emi’s plan.”

“Suzu, ah, Kamazuki-san...”

Maou swallowed the name he had almost called her, but what surprised him was Suzuno’s tone.

“Ma-Maou-san chased the pervert away, but he, he said that he had left the store to come for, for us, so I thought, it would be hard for him to go back, and I decided to accompany him...”

A tear subtly slipped out of Suzuno’s eyes. The look on her face was somewhere between crying and smiling as she tried to protect Maou with language she was not used to.

What kind of role are you playing, Maou almost said before he forcefully swallowed his words.

And then, Emi said something even more surprising.

“...Sadao.”

“...What is it?”

This was the first time Emi had ever addressed him by his first name in front of others.

“Chiho-chan’s returned home safely. Her mother seemed to be waiting for her.”

“Ah, aahhh, yes. I got it.”

For some reason, Maou could only manage a soft voice and a nod.

Kisaki had been listening to all of this in silence. Eventually, she said:

“...Well, if that’s the case, it can’t be helped.”

She sighed, as though giving up on something.

“We probably shouldn’t hire any more young ladies as part-timers. Who knows what might happen.”

After grumbling a little, Kisaki seemed to have mellowed out a little, and she put a hand on Maou’s shoulder.

“You are a very important person, both to me and the other employees. Because of that, I don’t want you to mess about. I’m proud that you wanted to protect Chiho and the other girls, but if you got hurt as a result of that, both they and I would be worried.”

“Kisaki-san...”

“I hope you’ll remember all of this – the day’s events, and how they felt.”

With that, Kisaki finally looked to Suzuno.

“Thank you for bringing Maa-kun... Maou back to us. In any case, please step inside. I’ll prepare a coffee for you. You too.”

After gently patting Maou’s shoulder, Kisaki turned to Suzuno and Emi.

“Well?”

“Ah, we...:

Suzuno and Emi looked at each other, seemingly about to say something. But then—

“Go have a drink.”

—Maou’s voice rudely interrupted theirs.

“If it’s Kisasi-san making it, it’ll taste good, even if it’s Mags’ coffee.”

Maou had no idea why he was being so shy about saying it. Suzuno and Emi looked at each other again.

“Don’t be stupid. Mags’ coffee tastes good regardless of who brews it.”

Kisasi poked Maou.

“Well then...”

“We’ll do as you say.”

Because it would be bad for Kisasi if he tried to push them again, he led the other two into the store.

“Ki-Ki-Kisasi-san!”

An ashen-faced crew member rushed out of the store, his eyes wide as he saw them.

“Ma-Maou-san’s back! Ah! Ah, well, it’s not just that.”

The crew members seemed to be in an uproar, waving their arms around and all, but Kisasi silenced them all into perfect military discipline with a single shout.

“Calm down! My crew members are not to panic no matter the circumstances! What happened?! Give me a report!”

In the face of this veteran commander’s fearsome order, the crewman did not move, but replied:

“Ma’am! Someone came out of the freezer, ma’am!”

“Ah?”

Kisaki, Maou, and even Suzuno and Emi responded in unison.

“Ma’am! A burnt-looking man came out of the freezer! He looks to have fainted, but what should we do about him, ma’am?”

“Could, could it be!”

“Ah, hey, Maa-kun!”

Maou ignored Kisaki and ran to the kitchen.

“Ehhhh?!”

There, he could not help but exclaim in surprise.

Sariel – who should have been flung to another world by the Gate – was sticking half-out of the industrial freezer, face down.

The bags of beans and chicken which should have been the freezer’s sole inhabitants protruded with him, so it looked as though a person had jumped out of the freezer.

“What, what is this?!” Kisaki shouted, having seen all of this from behind.

There was a sudden intake of breath from Suzuno and Emi.

“Demon King! Don’t tell me those decorations...”

Suzuno reflexively looked out to the entrance of the store.

The Gate which the Demon King had opened should not have opened here for no reason. All she could think of was that the Tanabata bamboo decorations set up by Maou had somehow resonated with the power of the Demon King that had opened the gate.

The bamboo which had attracted many customers had also drawn an uninvited guest, but Sariel would not go back now, even if they got rid of it.

“Guh... oog...”

However, before the chaos could calm down, Sariel writhed like a maggot and groaned, quickly recovering his consciousness.

If Sariel could still cause trouble at a time like this, then all that awaited them was despair.

Sariel had only fainted due to the battle. He had not lost his strength. Emi and Suzuno were fundamentally incapable of resisting Sariel, and the only person who could do so – Maou – had already expended his demonic magic.

They could not go around destroying subway lines and whatnot to shatter the peace once more. Soon, Sariel raised his head groggily.

“...Who are you and where are you from?”

Kisaki was prepared to treat the foolhardy Sariel as a dangerous person. How could he protect Kisaki from Sariel if he went wild? However, just as the Demon King, the Hero, and the First Interrogator of the Doctrinal Correction Council reached an accord— “...So beautiful...”

—Those dazed, stupefied words spilled from Sariel’s lips.

“Ah?”

Kisaki had no idea what Sariel was saying, and she decided not to provoke him by showing him an appeasing smile.

“Are you a goddess of beauty from another world...”

“...I have no idea what you’re talking about, but—”

Kisaki was visibly disturbed by Sariel’s reaction.

“Sariel, don’t tell me you...” Maou groaned as the most frightening scenario he could imagine ran through his mind. Shortly after that, Sariel’s cry immediately confirmed his hypothesis.

“Ahhhh, what fate is this? What miracle is this? That I should meet the goddess of beauty herself in Japan! Oh, the fires of forbidden love sear me! How I long to fall and become a fallen angel!”

“...”

Maou, Emi, and Suzuno had no idea how to react, and they stood

in place.

“The hell is this idiot on about?”

Kisaki dropped the hospitable attitude she had been using until just now, and glared disdainfully at Sariel.

Sariel, on his part, immediately fell to his knees, trying to get his messy body near Kisaki’s legs. At the same time, he cried: “Ah, to see your fair visage gazing down upon me from on high with that scornful look in your eyes! My heart sings like the great clock tower that tells the time in Heaven!”

“Oi, someone tell me what’s going on. What’s with this guy?”

“...Ah, actually, that’s... isn’t that the store leader from Sentucky?”

Sariel gladly accepted the introduction from Maou, and pointed outside.

“Ohhh, my darling, I am the store leader of the Hatagaya Station Branch of Sentucky Fried Chicken, known as Sarue. You and I, as members of eternally opposed organizations, are like the Romeo and Juliet of the fast food world!”

“...Is he a pervert?”

“The words which fall from your lips, be they abuse or otherwise, are like the sweet music of the heavens to me! I would gladly cast my body into the fires of Hell if only you would but turn to look at me! Oh, the roses I could send as a tribute to your beauty!”

After that:

“...Alright, someone translate that into Japanese for me.”

“Ah, I think he’s saying he’ll obey anything you say, Kisaki-san...”

Sariel nodded eagerly at Maou’s explanation. Kisaki closed her eyes and sighed.

“...Is that so? Oi, get a bit closer.”

In that instant, Sariel’s orange-stained eye seemed to shine like the

moon as he crawled up to Kisaki's feet.

"Ahhhhhhh! Such matchless joy! Dear God! Please forgive me! I must leave you now and descend into the inferno of pass-ackaugh!"

Kisaki drove her heel into Sariel's face. He made bizarre sounds before collapsing to the ground.

However, even after this treatment, the Archangel who possessed the Wicked Light of the Fallen had a look of bliss as the MgRonald's store leader trampled his face.

"What do you think store management is?! What's with your disgusting cologne and your panda face? Is this something a Sentucky store leader ought to be doing?!"

"Ahhh! Truly this is an invitation to fall! Was there ever a more irresistible nectar?!"

"Shut up, you damn pervert!"

Kisaki rolled her eyes at Maou as she cursed. So powerful was her glare that not just Maou, but even Emi and Suzuno gulped.

"Maa-kun... Did we actually *lose* to a store run by this idiot?"

"Ah... no, that, ah..."

"If you did... I wouldn't be surprised if everyone here was demoted to Antigua and Barbados."

"I don't even know where those countries are!"

"In any case, as the people in charge, you and I will need to return our wages. Dammit, does that mean I'm not trained enough? I can't take it lightly."

Kisaki reflected on her shortcomings just as easily as she had decided them, and even roped Maou into the mess. The frightening nature of her words scared Maou pale.

"Wait, waitwait, you're not joking, are you, Kisaki-san?!"

"I told you before. I don't believe in making unfunny jokes!"

“It’s okay even if it’s not funny!”

Maou was now clinging to Kisaki just like Sarii was.

“Ehhhhh, if you’re a man too, then be good! A gentleman should always show his best side!”

“This is the twenty-first century and I’m just a common citizen!”

The Demon King tried to convince Kisaki to change her mind.

As the part-timer and the store leader went back and forth, followed by the unexpectedly perverted leader of another store, Emi and Suzuno watched from afar and then looked at each other.

“...Really.”

“It’s not funny at all.”

The Hero of Ente Isla and the First Interrogator of the Holy Church’s Doctrinal Correction Council watched these happenings with satisfied expressions on their faces.

“Maou-san’s friend... huh? I’m not laughing at all. Why did I have to call the Demon King by his first name...”

“Su-Suzuno-san!” Chiho exclaimed as she saw Suzuno already within the Demon King’s Castle.

“What are you doing here?”

“Welcome, Chiho-san. As it happens, I just tried making black tea and pound cake with a rice cooker. Could you tell me how you find it?”

“S-sorry to interrupt you, Ashiya-san! I’d be glad to try it! ...Ah, no!”

Chiho’s feet pattered as she ran through the Demon King’s Castle. There, she saw Suzuno about to feed Maou with a pair of chopsticks as they sat at the kotatsu.

She did not hear her say “Ahh–” but given the way she was

pushing the food into his cheeks, it would seem they had not planned this.

Chiho inserted herself between Maou and Suzuno, putting Maou behind her, and then glared at Suzuno.

“What are you doing? Please do not get in my way.”

“What are *you* doing?! Maou-san, you too! Why are you being so passive?”

“Ah– er...”

Maou hung his head with a vaguely annoyed look on his face

“Suzuno-san is your enemy, isn’t she, Maou-san! Why is she proudly within your house, do-do-doing all those things with you which make me jealous...”

“Sasaki Chiho – you’re being honest~”

“Urushihara-san, please be quiet!”

After barking at Urushihara, Chiho turned to glare at Suzuno.

“As you said, I am fundamentally the Demon King’s enemy.”

And then, Suzuno adjusted her posture and put a calm expression on her face.

“However, the Demon King did not intend to treat me as such, and he allowed me to care for him. Therefore, I used consecrated rations in my cooking, pretending to repay their kindness and secretly building up harmful substances within their bodies...”

“I have no idea what you’re saying! Ashiya-san! Is it really alright for her to say this?!”

“Sasaki-san, I believe Ashiya is *painfully* aware of this, but...”

Saying so, Ashiya looked askance at Urushihara and held up a university notebook.

“Thanks to Lucifer’s unplanned expenditures, our household finances are going to be in the red for the next month. Though it

pains me deeply...

On the newest page of the “Demon King’s Castle’s Finance Ledger”, there was an entry reading “Credit Card Charge: 40,000 yen. User: Urushibaka.”

“40,000 yen? What did Urushibaka-san buy?”

“Don’t call me Urushibaka! Ashiya-san’s angry, but without that Sariel would have taken all of you to Ente Isla! Hurry up and thank me!”

“...But it was Maou-san’s money.”

“And this is the price of the tracker you secretly planted in Emilia’s bag.”

“...Disgusting.”

Chiho frowned in response to Ashiya’s whispered words.

“I don’t get it at all!”

Urushihara did not show any signs of repentance, insisting angrily on the validity of his expenditure.

“...Thanks to him, we’re over budget for this month... so we had to accept Crestia’s assassination in the form of food aid...”

“Please don’t scrimp until it shortens your lifespan!”

Chiho thumped the ledger onto the table.

“We can’t return it either, and eliminating deficits in the household finances is my top priority!”

Maou’s week as shift manager had ended up in him losing to the Sariel-led Sentucky Fried Chicken (Hatagaya Station branch) by the narrowest of margins.

Kisaki seemed to have awakened something in Sariel, and the next day, he took proper charge of the Hatagaya Station branch of Sentucky Fried Chicken as its store leader.

After that, Maou had been on guard for any dirty tricks, but Sariel

– or Sarue Mitsuki – had begun running his store in earnest, while sending roses to Kisaki every day. He even followed the principles of customer service as though everything he had done up to now had been a lie, and left her a card.

“When I surpass you, I shall come to receive you.”

The roses had come to her with that spine-chilling message.

“He’s looking down on me,” she muttered.

Kisaki was angry, but the flowers had done nothing wrong. Therefore, she had left the roses in the store for the customers to take home.

Even if Sariel was staying because of Kisaki, he could not go back even if he wanted to.

Sariel’s mission here had failed, and he had done so through being defeated by the Demon King Satan. Perhaps he had been judged a fallen angel because of that.

Sariel had infiltrated Sentucky not because of any strategy, but because he did not have anything to convert into cash like Suzuno. Thus, he had to work for a living.

As for Suzuno, what Chiho saw explained everything.

“In any case, Suzuno-san, you’re still Suzuno-san, aren’t you? Why are you hanging around so leisurely in the enemy camp?”

“For the sake of my justice, of course.”

Suzuno smiled to Chiho, with a heartfelt intensity that nobody else had seen until today.

“I wish to slay the Demon King, of course. But before that, I want to bring Emilia back to reform the corrupt Church. As the foundation of truth and faith, the Church must be a place to safeguard the sacred. But Emilia will not return without defeating the Demon King, no? Therefore, I must weaken the opposition so that Emilia can defeat the Demon King anytime she wishes.”

Chiho was left speechless by Suzuno's frank and casual words.

"That's enough! Do you think Maou-san won't do anything? Is that why you said that?"

Chiho's arms and legs were flailing about, but Maou was being passive, so he did not say anything.

He had lost his demonic magic to begin with, and with the additional burdens of being shift manager piled on top of that, even his strength was running out.

Worse; the wreckage of Dullahan-go which Suzuno had smashed had been traced back to him through the anti-theft label on it. The police had entered the Demon King's Castle and his wallet had been squeezed dry by the hefty fine for leaving bulky garbage outside City Hall. Thus, Maou was completely defeated.

After having to squander a chance to regain his demonic magic, being savagely lectured by Ashiya, and even Suzuno's sacred food attacks, it would be strange if he was *not* in a bad way.

"Let me cook for Maou-san! There's no need for you to worry, Suzuno-san! Please go out and find a job before you become a NEET!"

"I cannot do that. Also, this is the job I should do. Now that the Demon King is powerless, this is the perfect opportunity!"

"Are you serious?! What kind of weird logic is that?! You just want Maou-san to eat your food, right?"

"Oh? Is that reason acceptable to you. In truth, I do bear goodwill for the Demon King. The heart-shaped bento represents the sacred red heart of the holy grail. Could you accept the fact that I was not trying to harm him, but show him my love?"

"Who who who who's going to accept whatever love or whatnot?! You just mistook festival food for everyday Japanese food! Besides, I can tell it's a lie with just a glance!"

“What is?”

“Please don’t pretend you don’t know! Hey, Maou-san! You don’t need to accept aid and comfort from the enemy! I’ll ask Mom to teach me and I’ll bring lots of food over for you!”

“Hm hm, then I’ll need to go visit Sasaki-san’s mother,” Ashiya muttered to himself as he cleaned the kitchen floor.

“Think about it, Demon King. If you refuse my cooking now, I will stop my food aid.”

“What kind of coercive diplomacy is that?! Maou-san, you don’t need to worry! I’ll take goooooood care of you!”

“...Well, Maou seems to be quite popular. What a surprise.”

Urushihara rested his elbow on the computer desk and mumbled to himself.

“Still, he looks like a servant.”

During this time, the feud between the females seemed to be getting more and more intense.

“Then! Between Chiho-dono and myself—”

“Whose food will you eat?!”

Pressed by Suzuno and Chiho, Maou grumbled in utter exasperation:

“Come on... at least let me have breakfast in peace.”

But Maou’s wish was shattered beyond repair in the next moment.

With a great whoosh and displacement of air, the door to the Demon King’s castle burst open, and everyone looked toward it in surprise.

There stood—

“Lu~Ci~Fer!”

—Yusa Emi, who was surrounded by such a dreadful aura of

wrath that she looked like she was going to transform into a half-angel.

She stomped through the Demon King's Castle like she was trying to put her foot through the floor. In her hand, she held something like a small box.

Seeing this, Lucifer furrowed his brow and plastered to himself to the wall in an attempt to free.

“What did you put this into my bag for?!”

That was the transmitter mentioned earlier, the one which would be used to track Emilia's movements.

“Ah, no, that, ah...”

“What did you have in mind by tracking the location of a woman like myself with this transmitter?! You NEET fallen angel! I won't forgive your perverted acts! Time for punishment!”

Though Urushihara was terrified by Emi's furious anger, everybody else had returned to how they had been before Emi showed up.

“Oi, oi! Ashiya! Stop Emilia!”

“Nothing to do with me.”

“There is! There's a lot to do with you! Come on, Bell!”

“If Emilia eliminates all of you here, that will be another problem solved.”

“Why're you saying such worrying things?! Please, Sasaki Chiho! Stop Emilia!”

“Yusa-san! Make sure you punish him good!”

“You ingrate! Go to hell! Hey, Emilia! Calm down! There was a good reason for it!”

“Enough talk! If you want to die well, start with seppuku!”

“That's just ridiculous!”

“Please, guys... just let me have my breakfast in peace...”

Maou’s pained mumblings were drowned out by the sound of the unfolding battle.

The six-tatami Demon King’s Castle bore the ravages of a new war, and presided over a priceless peace.

The searing sunlight told them all that the summer days had truly come.

AUTHOR, AFTERWORD –AND YOU–

As everyone knows, royalties (stamp duties) are the source of an author's income. It is even defined in the Kojien.

Royalties represent a fee paid to the author for using his work, paid by the publisher and other parties. It is a fixed commission based on pricing and circulation. - taken from the 6th Edition of the Kojien
There is also a tax document which covers income gained of this sort, known as a “taxation instrument”.

Back then, people did not pay cash, but purchased fixed-amount income and stamp labels and attached them as needed to pay the tax required by the taxation instrument.

Why am I saying this is similar to the royalties that an author collects?

Once, in Japan, all books had to have something called “inspection papers” – stamped with the author's seal – on their copyright pages. The copyright fees paid to the author for his work depended on how many inspection papers there were.

Nowadays, the inspection paper system is essentially gone, but if you look through the copyright pages of old books or items designated as protected literature in libraries, you can still see them and the space for the inspection seal.

Putting a special label on documents to give them legal effect and monetary value was quite similar, so the term “stamp” came from “stamp duty”.

However, now that the inspection paper system is a thing of the past, why is the author's income from his work still called stamp duty?

I learned the answer on the day my maiden work, “Hataraku Maou-sama!” went for sale.

I wanted to see my name on the cover, and when I went to the bookshops, I actually saw someone taking one of my books to the cashier right before my eyes.

The royalties I receive for writing “Hataraku Maou-sama!” derive in most part from the money which my dear readers pay for buying my work.

This was when I fully appreciated the reality of the situation.

I live on the royalties paid by the readers, who look forward to and take pleasure in my work.

Then, how shall I use the royalties which everyone has paid me?

If one says that those who are paid from the public trust are public servants, then authors ought to be the readers’ servants.

To an author like myself, who receives royalties based on the stamp duties that the readers pay, I have an obligation to properly utilize the royalties given to me so I can properly render a finished work to the readers.

From the moment I picked up my pen, and as I shook Japan and the world, I – as a two-bit player in the entertainment industry – have agonized about what I should be doing. But in the end, I reached the conclusion that I needed to properly utilize my royalties to return a proper work, that will delight many people, to everyone.

Also, I need to take it seriously, so that the things I give can bring smiles to the readers’ faces.

Truly I am an arrogant author who does not know his limits, a mere fledgling who still dares to take the lives and money of my readers.

This story has nothing to do with the author’s grim resolve. It is still about a band of friends who work hard to live each day happily.

Finally, please allow me to apologize to all the readers in

Greenland on the Demon King's behalf for his unwise words.

『はたらく魔王さま! 2』
巻末特別企画

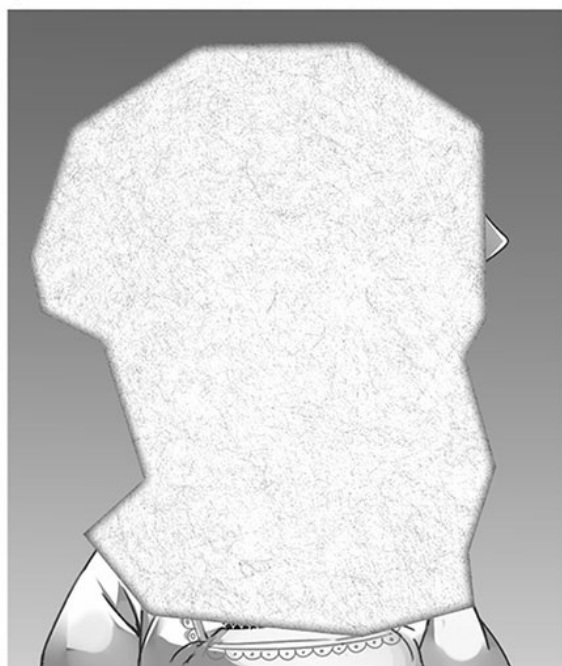
履歴書集

偽
履歴書

← 落書きすぽよ！ by 鈴乃
聖職者が嘘ついたー by 真奥

Character File

05a



ふりがな	かまうき すずの
氏名	鎌月 鈴乃 聖職者が また嘘ついたー by 真奥
生年月日	平成×年 10月 1日生 (満18歳) 性別 女
ふりがな	とうきょうとしがくせさつか
現住所	東京都渋谷区笹塚 ×-×-× 何故か貴様に 嘘だと分かる！ by 鈴乃
電話番号	03-XXXX-XXXX 上がったらドコモにしない？ by 真奥

年	月	学歴・職歴
平成××年		私立聖ブルーローズ学園中学校卒業
平成××年		私立聖ブルーローズ学園高等学校入学
平成2×年		私立聖ブルーローズ学園高等学校卒業

資格	漢字検定準一級 ← す、すごい！ by 千穂		
特技・趣味	園芸、和服の着付け、料理、人間観察		
志望動機	奉公で一人前の職人になり、郷里の父母に代わりをすため		
本人希望欄	あだ名をつけてもら『あ鈴』で ← さすがに時代劇見すぎじゃない？ by 真奥		
通勤時間	住み込み希望	扶養家族の有無	保護者の氏名

↑
うさんくせー ばい うろいはら もうちょっとヒネれよ
↑ 貴様は除外す by 鈴乃 by 真奥

FAKECV

- The cleric's lying by Maou
- Stop scribbling on this! by Suzuno

Name:Kamazuki Suzuno **DOB:**Heisei 0Xth year
10th month (18 years old)

- The cleric's lying again~ by Maou
- How do YOU know I'm lying? by Suzuno

Sex: Female **Address:** Tokyo, Shibuya, Sasazuka
X.X.X Villarosa Sasazuka Rm 202

Tel no: I don't have one

- Why not a DoCoDeMo? by Emi

Education and Work Experience: Heisei XXth
year: Graduated from St. Bluerose Middle School
Heisei XXth year: Entered St. Bluerose High
School Heisei 2Xth year: Graduated from St.
Bluerose High School

Qualifications: Kanji Proficiency Level 1

- That-that's awesome! by Chiho

Skills and Hobbies:

Traditional dress

Watching humanity

Reasons for seeking employment: To become an independent working adult and provide for my parents.

Personal Aspirations: If you want to give me a nickname, call me O-Suzu

- Which period drama did you get this from?
by Emi

Commuting time:I'd like to be a domestic helper **Dependents:** Every man is my brother

- That's just way too fake bai Urushihara
- You're not included by Suzuno

Name of Guardian:

Kamazuki Suzuko

- Come on, you can do better than this by Maou

履歴書



ふりがな	かまづき すずの
氏名	鎌日 鈴乃 <small>黙れ by 鈴乃</small> <small>ちゃんと書けよ by 真奥</small>
イグナツ (21) 年 秋 月 日生 (満21歳) 性別 女	
ふりがな	とうきょうとしまぐさぐさか
現住所	東京都渋谷区笹塚×-×-×
	ヴィラ・ローザ 笹塚 202号室
電話	持ちたくない

年	月	学歴・職歴
平成×年		西大陸、サント・イグナツ、ベル司教領の第三子として生まれる
平成××年		サント・イグナツ第一神学校卒業(教会法学専攻)
平成2×年		大法神教会宣教部所属
平成2×年		無職 by 真奥 ←求職中と言え by 鈴乃

資格	漢字検定準一級、神学博士号、教会法学士、宣教師資格、司祭資格	
特技・趣味	園芸、宣教、和服の着付け、料理、人間観察	
志望動機	世界平和	
本人希望欄	早く任務を達成して帰りたい	
通勤時間 1時間超	扶養家族の有無 いない	保護者の氏名 オルゴール・リッドマン・ベル

Name:Kamazuki Suzuno **DOB:**Ignora year 1211
(2X years old)

- Be more precise by Maou
- Shut up! by Suzuno

Sex:Female **Address:**Tokyo, Shibuya, Sasazuka
X.X.X Villarosa Sasazuka Rm 202

Tel no: None yet **Education and Work Experience:** Heisei 0Xth year: Born as 2nd daughter of Bishop Bell from St. Ignoret's of the Western Continent Heisei XXth year: Graduated from St. Ignoret's top theological college (majoring in religious law)

Heisei 2Xth year: Became a missionary for the Holy Church Heisei 2Xth year: Jobless (by Maou)

- I'm looking for a job! by Suzuno

Qualifications:

Kanji Proficiency Level 1

Doctorate in Theology

Bachelor's Degree in Religious Law Missionary
certification

Priest certification

Skills and Hobbies:

Wearing traditional dress

Watching humanity

Reasons for seeking employment: World peace
Personal Aspirations: Quickly accomplishing my aim and going home
Commuting time: 1 hour by Gate
Dependents: None
Name of Guardian:Orgo Sodeman Bell

履歴書



ふりがな	うるしはら はんぞう		
氏名	うるしはら はんぞう		
しら 年	まい 月	どう 日生 (満 歳) 性別	ふとこ
ふりがな	でも いい		
現住所	とうきょうとしぶやくささずか X-X-X 「づ」だよ by 真奥 グレイ・ローザささずか 201ごうし まおうじょう まおうかた		
電話	050-0000-0000 い、いつの間につ! by 芦屋		

年	月	学歴・職歴
		てんし
		だてんし
		あくまげんすい
		ふりーたー
		ニートだ by 真奥 ニートですね by 芦屋
		ニートよ by 恵美 サイターです。 by 千穂 ←おまえらっ!
		ばい うるし はら

資格	ない ←まず漢字書けるようになれ ←ばそんあるし おまこはできるし by 真奥 ばい うるしはら	
特技・趣味	なっとくうちゅうさんぽしたい ぐぐるあす すりーとびー	
志望動機	なりき	
本人希望欄	いえからでずた はたらけるしごと ←少しは家事を手伝え! by 芦屋	
通勤時間	せうりとかいところ に いかない	扶養家族の有無 が おめない 保護者の氏名 まおう さだお 甚だ遺憾である by 真奥

Name:Urushihara Hanzou **DOB:***I Have No Idea*
Sex:Male**Address:** Tokyo, Shibuya, Sasaduka

- That should be "zu" by Maou

Villarosa Sasazuka Rm 201

Demon King's Castle **Tel no:**050-0000-000

- When did you?! by Ashiya

Education and Work Experience: Angel

Fallen Angel Demon General Freeter

- He's just a NEET by Maou
- He's a NEET by Ashiya
- He's a NEET by Emi
- He's disgusting by Chiho
- You guys! bai Urushihara

Qualifications:None

- Start by learning kanji by Maou
- I have a computer and I can understand it
bai Urushihara

Skills and Hobbies: Internet surfing, Google Earth, Google Street View **Reasons for seeking employment:** Ever-changing **Personal Aspirations:** To be able to work without leaving the house

- Help with the housework! by Ashiya

Commuting time:I don't want to go too far
Dependents: I don't get it **Name of Guardian:**
Maou Sadao

- For which I am deeply regretful by Maou



TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Chapter 1

[1] Suginoya is a play on Yoshinoya, famous for beef rice bowls

[2] Sentucky Fried Chicken... you should know this by now

[3] Sasuke Delivery is a parody of Sagawa Delivery

[4] Probably a pun on the Mito Komon series

[5] PASMO cards are a kind of smart card.

CHAPTER 2

- [1]** a parody of Yamato Transportation Company's logo, a black cat
- [2]** Bosatsu-doori is a play on Kannon-doori, a shopping street
- [3]** Suica and PASMO are smart cashcards for train travel
- [4]** Suica is a homophone for watermelon in Japanese
- [5]** seaweed soup (konbuni) sounds like convenience store (konbini) in Japanese
- [6]** cabbage flowers are cross-shaped
- [7]** Mugi-hyo is a parody of the pawnshop Kome-hyo
- [8]** Washington Convention = CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)

CHAPTER 3

[1] As in, Skype